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# **Effective Altruism and Extreme Poverty**

by

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the requirements for the degree of  
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## **Declaration**

I declare that this work is my own. I have not previously published any part of this work. I confirm that this work has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

# Abstract

Effective altruism is a movement which aims to maximise good. Effective altruists are concerned with extreme poverty and many of them think that individuals have an obligation to donate to effective charities to alleviate extreme poverty. Their reasoning, which I will scrutinise, is as follows:

*Premise 1.* Extreme poverty is very bad.

*Premise 2.* If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it.

*Premise 3.* Individuals ought to choose the effective option in preventing very bad things.

*Premise 4.* Donating to effective charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty.

*Conclusion.* Individuals ought to donate to effective charities working towards extreme poverty alleviation where doing so does not require them to give up anything of moral significance.

I will scrutinise each of these premises in turn.

For Premise 1, I focus on hedonistic utilitarianism and criticise its outlook on extreme poverty. I claim that hedonistic utilitarianism might be problematic for effective altruism.

Premise 2 is Peter Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. I introduce several possible interpretations of it, and press several objections to it by stressing overpermissiveness, luck, and rights. I defend strengthening the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice without making it overdemanding.

I claim that Premise 3 can be attractive to both consequentialists and non-consequentialists. Nevertheless, by showing that effectiveness sometimes violates fairness, I propose a method which avoids always helping the greater number and always giving everyone equal chances of being helped, which is compatible with effective altruism.

Against Premise 4, I assess the systemic change objection, which states that effective altruism unjustifiably distracts individuals from systemic change. By considering risk and the moral standing of the future extremely poor, I claim that the systemic change objection is partially successful, but cannot undermine effective altruism.

After analysing all of these, I argue that individuals have an obligation to donate to effective charities to alleviate extreme poverty where doing so does not require them to give up anything of moral significance.

# Introduction

## What is effective altruism?

Effective altruism is a philosophical approach which commits itself to find the effective ways to do the most good. It is also a social movement because many people promote and practice the tenets of effective altruism in their everyday lives.

Effective altruism has two components: *effectiveness* and *altruism*. Effectiveness is mostly linked to cost-effectiveness in the context of effective altruism. It reflects the idea that the success of interventions not only comes from their ability to solve problems but also their ability to solve problems with as few resources as possible. Altruism stands for the practice of being concerned with others' lives and improving them, as opposed to egoism which mainly emphasises self-interest. Effective altruism merges effectiveness and altruism, which makes it a distinct philosophical approach.

Effective altruism has different *cause areas*. One of its cause areas is the focus of this thesis, namely, extreme poverty. Effective altruists are concerned with the conditions that the hundreds of millions of extremely poor people across the globe are subject to, who have to live on just under US\$1.90 per day.<sup>1</sup> According to the most recent estimates, the number of extremely poor decreased from 1,895 billion in 1990 to 736 million by 2015.<sup>2</sup> Effective altruism

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank Group, "Piecing Together: The Poverty Puzzle," *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2018*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank Group, 2.

owes its emergence largely to Peter Singer's philosophy according to which donating to charities to improve the lives of the extremely poor is a moral obligation. In its early years, effective altruism exclusively focused on extreme poverty through Giving What We Can, co-founded by Toby Ord and William MacAskill, two philosophers of effective altruism who advocated donating a significant portion of one's income to alleviate extreme poverty. There are other cause areas of effective altruism which will not be analysed in this thesis. One of those cause areas is animal welfare. Many effective altruists defend the claims that animals have moral standing, and that preventing animal suffering is of utmost importance, given that trillions of animals suffer each year either due to animal farming or because of natural causes. Another cause area that has emerged over recent years is the long-term future. A significant portion of effective altruists has become more and more attracted to the idea that saving humanity from extinction risks is critical. Although I will not be covering the issues related to extinction risks, I will be focusing on providing better institutions for the future by looking at the systemic change objection. There are many organisations centred around the general principles of effective altruism apart from Giving What We Can: such as GiveWell, 80,000 Hours, the Global Priorities Institute at the University of Oxford, the Future of Humanity Institute at the University of Oxford, The Centre for Effective Altruism, and Forethought Foundation, to name a few.

Effective altruism has a *welfarist* orientation. By welfarist, I denote the inclination to evaluate interventions with respect to the increase in a person's welfare. Effective altruism attaches importance to increasing people's quality of life and preventing

people from having bad lives. But, by having a welfarist orientation, effective altruism excludes non-welfarist views which attach inherent goodness to concepts like freedom, knowledge, diversity, art, etc. But, as MacAskill points out, it is merely a working assumption and may be liable to change.<sup>3</sup>

One of the other important features of effective altruism is that it is *cause-neutral*. Identifying the promising causes whose cost-effective solutions bring about the greatest good is a difficult task. To find them, one has to be unbiased in selecting causes and impartially evaluate their importance, neglectedness and tractability.<sup>4</sup> While effective altruism currently tackles problems under its cause areas, these cause areas are apt to change whenever the opportunities and challenges change. In other words, these cause areas are not fixed and effective altruists compare them with other ever-changing problems to understand their respective weight.

Effective altruism is also eager to be fed by *empirical evidence*. Effective altruists extensively use empirical evidence in the case of extreme poverty. For instance, it appeals to the research done by GiveWell. GiveWell is a meta-charity which assesses the cost-effectiveness of different charities which improve the lives of the extremely poor. GiveWell uses field data, economic models, surveys, and forecasts to understand which charities bring about more benefit per unit of resources than other charities. Effective altruists usually consider the recommendations of GiveWell in order to decide where to donate to alleviate extreme poverty.

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<sup>3</sup> William MacAskill, "The Definition of Effective Altruism," in *Effective Altruism: Philosophical Issues*, eds. Hilary Greaves and Theron Pummer (New York: Oxford University, 2019), 18.

<sup>4</sup> I will return to this criteria in Chapter 4.

MacAskill also defines effective altruism as "maximising" and "science-aligned".<sup>5</sup> It is maximising because it does not merely aim for the good but the *most* good with the resources available. It is science-aligned because effective altruists believe that "The best means to figuring out how to do the most good is the scientific method, broadly construed to include reliance on careful rigorous argument and theoretical models as well as data".<sup>6</sup>

From time to time, I will use the term "effective altruists" alongside "effective altruism". There are a variety of effective altruists, each of whom has different perspectives, ideologies, and beliefs. Whenever I use effective altruists, I either refer to leading philosophers and figures in the effective altruism community whose contributions made effective altruism "effective altruism", or to people who share the core positions of effective altruism and identify themselves as effective altruists.

## What are the premises of effective altruism?

In this thesis, I will scrutinise the premises of an effective altruist argument for why we have a *moral obligation* to alleviate *extreme poverty*.

*Premise 1.* Extreme poverty is very bad.

*Premise 2.* If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing

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<sup>5</sup> MacAskill, 14.

<sup>6</sup> MacAskill, 14.

anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it.<sup>7</sup>

*Premise 3.* Individuals ought to choose the effective option in preventing very bad things.

*Premise 4.* Donating to effective charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty.

*Conclusion.* Individuals ought to donate to effective charities working towards extreme poverty alleviation where doing so does not require them to give up anything of moral significance.

In scrutinising the premises of this effective altruist argument for why we have a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty, I put to one side, as I have said, arguments surrounding other cause areas, such as animal suffering and the long-term future (concerning extinction risks). I also put aside arguments which focus on effective giving but do not claim that we are obligated to give. For example, Theron Pummer suggests that we may not be obligated to give, but *if we choose* to give, we are obligated to give effectively.<sup>8</sup> We may also think that giving effectively is not a moral requirement at all, but rather a *rational* requirement. If we choose to give, and in doing so we want to do the most good, we rationally should give effectively. Therefore, not every effective altruist necessarily accepts these premises, but these premises altogether constitute the commonly accepted argument of effective altruism with regards to extreme poverty.

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<sup>7</sup> This is Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. Refer to Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 231.

<sup>8</sup> Theron Pummer, "Whether and Where to Give," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 44, no. 1 (2016): 87.



The above argument is based on Peter Singer's famous argument for obligations to help the extremely poor, first articulated in the seminal article "Famine, Affluence, and Morality".<sup>9</sup> In this article, which has been very important in the development of the effective altruism movement, Singer asks whether we would be obligated to save a drowning child when we are walking past a pond, if we do not sacrifice something of comparable moral significance (or, in the weaker version, something of moral significance). Singer argues that we would. Singer also argues that responding to this positively entails that we ought to alleviate the plight of the extremely poor, because people in distant regions who immensely suffer under extreme poverty are no different than the drowning child.<sup>10</sup> This is the general reasoning inherited by effective altruists from Singer.

Singer's weaker argument from "Famine, Affluence and Morality" can be summarised as follows:

1. Suffering and death from famine are bad.
2. If we can prevent something very bad from happening without thereby sacrificing anything of moral significance, we should do so.
3. We would not be sacrificing anything of moral significance if we sent our money to famine relief instead of buying luxuries.

The conclusion is that we ought to send the money to famine relief and it is wrong not to do so.

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 229-243.

<sup>10</sup> Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", 231-232.

The argument I have laid out is very similar, but importantly different. This is because, as I will argue in Chapter 3, Singer's argument does not lead us to effective altruism. Although this argument has been an inspiration for effective altruism, it does not lead us all the way to it. Part of my argument in this thesis is that Singer's argument must be supplemented by an effectiveness principle in order to deliver effective altruism.

Taking us back to the argument, I have constructed, I will examine each premise in turn, taking a chapter on each (with the exception of Premise 4, which I examine over the course of two chapters). I argue that the conclusion of effective altruism is true, but I will develop many critiques and objections to effective altruism, as presented in this argument. I aim to resolve the problems arising from those critiques and objections, which will help to reorientate effective altruism in a better direction.

In Chapter 1, while I assume that deeming extreme poverty very bad is uncontroversial, I argue that approaching this assumption through the lens of hedonistic utilitarianism results in two repugnant conclusions. The first repugnant conclusion is that hedonistic utilitarianism may morally justify extreme poverty if it does not produce suffering. I use a thought experiment, *Zero Suffering Operation*, to show that. The second repugnant conclusion is that hedonistic utilitarianism could morally justify the secret killing of the extremely poor. I conclude that any plausible account of effective altruism should leave behind hedonistic utilitarianism in approaching the badness of extreme poverty to avoid these repugnant conclusions. This is of utmost importance to effective altruism because many effective altruists are utilitarians, some are hedonistic utilitarians, and a version of effective altruism aligning

with hedonistic utilitarianism could bring about a moral problem. Moreover, while it is uncontroversial that extreme poverty is bad, misdiagnosing *why* it is bad will lead us to the wrong solutions and charities. In other words, if we have a faulty account of the problem, we will be led, at least sometimes, to the wrong solutions.

In Chapter 2, I delve into the territory of moral obligations. Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, which I take to be the second premise of effective altruism, is different from Singer's Stronger Principle of Sacrifice. Singer's Stronger Principle of Sacrifice asks individuals to sacrifice everything except our necessities to alleviate extreme poverty, whereas Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice asks individuals to sacrifice things which are not morally significant. I disaggregate the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice and present four alternative readings of "moral significance" which is a concept that has wrongly been taken as self-evident and rarely studied with regards to Singer's work. These four alternative readings of moral significance are in conflict with each other and only one of them could be accepted by Singer—yet this reading has still its own problems. While Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is one of those premises which has been or could easily be accepted by effective altruists in determining the scope of one's moral obligation towards the extremely poor, this seemingly plausible principle is in fact overpermissive because it allows lavish pursuits. Moreover, it reduces responsibility to mere ability and neglects other potential sources of responsibility. Finally, it does not say anything about moral rights even if it establishes moral obligations. These are common problems of the effective altruist discourse which is reflected by Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. I discuss the lessons that effective altruists could take from these problems, and

argue that by introducing additional moral principles which strengthen effective altruism, these problems could be avoided without undermining Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice.

In Chapter 3, I first show that Peter Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not lead to *effective* altruism—it only leads to *altruism*. The inadequacy of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice calls for a new principle based on effectiveness. I then support two arguments for effectiveness through an outcome-based principle and an obligation-based principle. While I take effectiveness to be a valuable feature of effective altruism, I show that solely endorsing it could lead effective altruists to unjustly favour the well-off, prefer distributing tiny benefits to a large number of well-off as opposed to distributing large benefits to a small number of worst-off, and perpetuate the unequal luck distribution among the worst-off including the extremely poor. Since these problems inevitably show the importance of fairness, I support a method of assistance which does not base itself exclusively on effectiveness but also takes into account fairness. Such a method takes into account the difference between group sizes of potential beneficiaries and the relative importance of fairness to utility. I show that this not only overcomes the problems created by solely endorsing effectiveness but would also be attractive to many effective altruists.

In Chapter 4, I analyse whether donating to charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty by focusing on the systemic change objection. The systemic change objection holds that effective altruism unjustifiably distracts individuals from allocating their spare resources to systemic change. Before analysing the systemic change objection, I examine how GiveWell works and its limitations, which is the organisation often consulted

by effective altruists when they want to donate to alleviate extreme poverty. Next, by presenting empirical research on extreme poverty, I show that the systemic causes of extreme poverty (which are often a reflection of deep and chronic institutional problems) are so serious that merely donating may not be sufficient. Then, I scrutinise the systemic change objection with respect to risk, which leads me to argue that we should neither allocate all of our spare resources to effective charities nor to systemic change. Instead, we should find a balance.

In Chapter 5, I continue to analyse whether donating to charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty by focusing on the systemic change objection. This time, I focus on the moral standing of the future extremely poor, and the non-identity problem which challenges the systemic change objection. The presence of the future extremely poor is important for our decision regarding how to allocate our spare resources, because they will be affected by the presence or the lack of systemic change. I claim that we should give equal moral weight to the existing extremely poor and the future extremely poor, which implies that we should not neglect systemic change. After showing several variables which help us to understand how to decide to allocate our spare resources between effective charities and systemic change, I introduce the non-identity problem as a potential objection to allocating our spare resources to systemic change. By introducing the case of local harms, I show that the non-identity problem is not a threat to allocating our spare resources to systemic change. Finally, I grant that we have reasons to accept that donating to effective charities is one of the ways to alleviate extreme poverty but we should also

allocate our spare resources to systemic change—this conclusion is the same conclusion I reach in the previous chapter.

In the conclusion, I state that the conclusion of effective altruism is correct: individuals ought to donate to effective charities working towards extreme poverty alleviation where doing so does not require them to give up anything of moral significance. As shown through the analysis of premises, this conclusion is neither self-evident nor immune to objections, but it could be granted and defended.

## The aims of this thesis and effective altruism as a field of philosophical study

As effective altruism is a relatively young philosophical approach, it raises many different questions in different areas of moral and political philosophy, ranging from the definition of good, the optimal distribution of good, the nature of moral obligations, tensions between effectiveness and fairness, the desirability of systemic change, population ethics and the non-identity problem. This thesis, as one of the first theses written on effective altruism, aims to unravel these questions and respond to them.

Another aim of this thesis is to apply already existing or emerging discussions to effective altruism. For instance, it analyses the long-standing tradition of hedonistic utilitarianism with regards to the badness of extreme poverty, demonstrates the hardship of choosing charities when faced with the tension between effectiveness and fairness, and builds a bridge between systemic change and effective altruism.

Moreover, this thesis aims to visit the rarely visited areas of philosophy, some of which are the overpermissiveness of moral obligations (as opposed to the demandingness of moral obligations), different ways of understanding moral significance, the effect of changing group sizes on our decision regarding whom to help, and the relationship between systemic change and the future extremely poor who will be a subset of the future people.

Overall, this thesis supports effective altruism and recognises effective altruism as a field of philosophical study, but it argues for changes in the way we understand and promote effective altruism.

# **Chapter 1**

## **The Badness of Extreme Poverty and Hedonistic Utilitarianism**

### *Premise 1*

*Extreme poverty is very bad.*

#### **1.1 Introduction**

As it brings about immense suffering, leads to the violation of rights, and renders the extremely poor vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination and exclusion, extreme poverty is clearly very bad. Since its emergence, effective altruism has always preserved the alleviation of extreme poverty as one of its central cause areas, and the movement can be traced to Peter Singer's writings on our obligations regarding extreme poverty. However, effective altruists must explain and make clear how they understand the badness of extreme poverty, as different accounts of its badness will license different solutions and measures to combat it. This chapter concerns one way of explaining the badness of extreme poverty, that is, the hedonistic utilitarian account. I will argue that effective altruists should not align themselves with hedonistic utilitarianism,



and that hedonistic utilitarianism provides a poor diagnosis of the badness of extreme poverty.

In a recent survey, more than half of effective altruists state that they lean towards utilitarianism and thus they comprise the largest group in the effective altruism community.<sup>11</sup> And, as we might expect, some effective altruists are *hedonistic utilitarians*. For instance, one of the leading figures of effective altruism, Peter Singer has become a hedonistic utilitarian after devoting almost an entire life to being a preference utilitarian.<sup>12</sup>

I regard Premise 1 as uncontroversial. However, I think hedonistic utilitarianism offers an inadequate explanation for why extreme poverty is very bad. In the following, I argue that hedonistic utilitarianism leads to two repugnant conclusions. The first repugnant conclusion is that, since hedonistic utilitarianism *solely* appeals to suffering and thereby ignores other morally significant reasons, hedonistic utilitarianism would not find extreme poverty as very bad if one day extreme poverty no longer leads to suffering. To demonstrate how this might be possible, I utilise a thought experiment, *Zero Suffering Operation*. The second repugnant conclusion is that hedonistic utilitarianism can morally justify the secret killing of the extremely poor. After unfolding these repugnant conclusions, by referring to a rights-based theory and a version of

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<sup>11</sup> William MacAskill, "The Definition of Effective Altruism", 18-19.

<sup>12</sup> Once a well-known preference utilitarian, Singer has switched to hedonistic utilitarianism. Refer to Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 263. Singer is close to the version of hedonistic utilitarianism formulated by Henry Sidgwick. According to Roger Crisp, Sidgwick's view is that "what is ultimately good for me is pleasurable experience, and that a life becomes better for me the greater the balance of pleasure over pain in that life" in Roger Crisp, "Pleasure and Hedonism in Sidgwick," in *Underivative Duty*, ed. Thomas Hurka (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 32.

global egalitarianism, I briefly show that appealing to morally significant reasons other than suffering brings advantages to effective altruism. I conclude that effective altruists should not approach the badness of extreme poverty only through the lens of hedonistic utilitarianism as the moral scope of hedonistic utilitarianism is too limited.

Since Premise 1, and the moral stance behind it, is so uncontroversial, it does not seem to have attracted much attention within the effective altruism movement, nor the philosophical writings surrounding it. For instance, there is no chapter in a recent collection of essays on effective altruism devoted to this question.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no extensive philosophical discussion among effective altruists regarding how different philosophical accounts approach extreme poverty, and which one these accounts should be preferred over others, or, at least, which of these accounts are undesirable *for* effective altruism. This chapter aims to start filling this gap in the literature.

## 1.2 Suffering caused by extreme poverty

In general, effective altruists have a broad understanding of the suffering caused by extreme poverty. In what is called "The Basic Argument", Singer states that "Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad".<sup>14</sup> Evidently, lack of food, shelter, and medical care are some of the elements of suffering caused by extreme poverty. Singer mentions other elements of

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<sup>13</sup> Hilary Greaves and Theron Pummer, eds., *Effective Altruism: Philosophical Issues* (New York: Oxford University, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save* (New York: Random House, 2009), 15.

suffering caused by extreme poverty such as being unable to save money and being entrapped under debt bondage due to high-interest rates, inaccessibility to adequate education, and living in a very low-quality house.<sup>15</sup> Just like Singer, William MacAskill recognises that the extremely poor who have managed to survive consume "about half of what is recommended for a physically active man or a very physically active woman" and thus most of them are "underweight and anaemic".<sup>16</sup> Their houses often lack "electricity, toilets or tap water".<sup>17</sup>

Although these elements of suffering caused by extreme poverty are related to material needs, Singer and MacAskill are aware that the suffering caused by extreme poverty is not only related to material needs. For instance, Singer writes that extreme poverty produces suffering through "a degrading state of powerlessness", which forces the extremely poor to "accept humiliation without protest", and the law does not "necessarily protect [the extremely poor] from rape or sexual harassment".<sup>18</sup> Singer also maintains that the extremely poor have a "pervading sense of shame and failure" and they "lose hope of ever escaping from a life of hard work".<sup>19</sup> MacAskill notes that the extremely poor spend most of their income to buy food which restricts their freedom to spend what they gain more gratifyingly.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Singer, 6.

<sup>16</sup> William MacAskill, *Doing Good Better* (London: Guardian Faber, 2016), 24.

<sup>17</sup> MacAskill, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Singer, 6.

<sup>20</sup> MacAskill, *Doing Good Better*, 24.

Some have pointed out other elements of suffering caused by extreme poverty. They include bureaucratic barriers in financial services<sup>21</sup>, inability to rest<sup>22</sup>, and threats to friendship.<sup>23</sup>

### 1.3 The repugnant conclusions of hedonistic utilitarianism

While we can all agree that extreme poverty is bad for a person, especially when compared with a life of material comfort, philosophically we must explain *why* it is bad. Hedonistic utilitarianism is one way to do this. Hedonistic utilitarianism has two central claims: an account of personal well-being and an account of right action. Firstly, it claims that what makes a life go well or badly can be reduced to two components of life: pleasure and suffering. According to hedonistic utilitarianism, only what produces pleasure is good for a person and only what produces suffering is bad for a person. In that respect, hedonistic utilitarianism is a welfarist moral approach. Recall that effective altruism is also a welfarist moral approach, although it does not need to be based on hedonistic utilitarianism. But it *can* be based on hedonistic utilitarianism, and *if*

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<sup>21</sup> Jahel Queralto, "A Human Right to Financial Inclusion," in *Ethical Issues in Poverty Alleviation*, ed. Helmut P. Gaisbauer, Gottfried Schweiger and Clemens Sedmak (Springer, 2016), 80.

<sup>22</sup> Helmut P. Gaisbauer, Gottfried Schweiger and Clemens Sedmak, "Ethical Issues in Poverty Alleviation: Agents, Institutions and Policies" in *Ethical Issues in Poverty Alleviation*, ed. Helmut P. Gaisbauer, Gottfried Schweiger and Clemens Sedmak (Springer, 2016), 2.

<sup>23</sup> John Tasioulas, "The Moral Reality of Human Rights" in *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right*, ed. Thomas Pogge (Paris and Oxford: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Oxford University, 2007), 78.

it is to be based on hedonistic utilitarianism, then it will produce the same repugnant conclusions which will be discussed below.

Secondly, just like effective altruism which aims to maximise the good in the world, hedonistic utilitarianism is also maximising: it aims to maximise net pleasure. Hedonistic utilitarianism is indifferent to how pleasure should be distributed and thus is indifferent to comparative notions like fairness. Effective altruism does not value fairness for its own sake either. While hedonistic utilitarianism has similarities with effective altruism, effective altruism does not entail hedonistic utilitarianism, and vice versa. But their similarities mean that effective altruists could easily become hedonistic utilitarians.

It is impossible to deny that extreme poverty leads to a lot of suffering. But it is possible to link the badness of extreme poverty *exclusively* to suffering. This is what hedonistic utilitarianism does: since it claims that happiness and suffering are the only things of ultimate moral importance, it finds extreme poverty bad *only* because it brings about suffering. Likewise, the degree of the badness of extreme poverty would depend entirely on the extent of net suffering it yields.

Since hedonistic utilitarianism does not appeal to morally significant reasons other than suffering in explaining the badness of extreme poverty, there are two repugnant conclusions of hedonistic utilitarianism. The first is that hedonistic utilitarianism can morally justify extreme poverty if it is without suffering, which is discussed in §1.3.1. The second is that hedonistic utilitarianism can morally justify the secret killing of the extremely poor, which is discussed in §1.3.2. Because of these repugnant conclusions, I argue that effective altruism has to distance itself from hedonistic utilitarianism.

### 1.3.1 Hedonistic utilitarianism can morally justify extreme poverty if it is without suffering

The first repugnant conclusion of hedonistic utilitarianism is that it can morally justify extreme poverty if it is without suffering. It is rather inconceivable that extreme poverty can ever be without suffering. Nonetheless, technically, it is possible. Consider *Zero Suffering Operation*.

*Zero Suffering Operation*. Subsidised if the patient is extremely poor, a very low-cost operation known as Zero Suffering Operation is invented. Granting people immunity to any type of suffering, doctors manipulate a specific area of the brain so that people perceive their conditions as positive. It also amplifies the pleasantness of already positive experiences. Motivated by the advantages of the operation and encouraged by the doctors, Hope, as an extremely poor person, decides to undergo it. After the operation, Hope is provided regular medical care by the doctors to avoid death because Zero Suffering Operation also wipes suffering from health issues away. Nevertheless, Hope is still stuck in extreme poverty.

Hope now lacks the elements of suffering that the extremely poor are normally subject to: Hope does not feel pain from hunger and dehydration, delights in the hard work while paying debt with high-interest rates, repairs shattered houses after severe weather

with joy, and Hope's self-image is not miserable and vulnerable.<sup>24</sup> Hope is being exploited through high-interest rates, being overworked and not being able to receive what is deserved: but Hope does not have any complaints against these because of the Zero Suffering Operation.

Hope's conditions are physically and mentally better than those of other extremely poor people. If we had solely appealed to suffering when regarding extreme poverty as very bad like hedonistic utilitarians, then we would conclude that the Zero Suffering Operation ends the badness of extreme poverty.<sup>25</sup> Without producing mental suffering, extreme poverty would become morally unproblematic.<sup>26</sup>

For instance, in Zero Suffering Operation, the forms of exploitation that the extremely poor are subject to are not morally significant as long as they do not change the hedonistic calculation. Certainly, forms of exploitation like being overworked, debt bondage, social exclusion and denial of political participation lead to the suffering of the extremely poor. Nonetheless, the extremely poor

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<sup>24</sup> Hope's case is currently hypothetical. Yet, there is an ongoing research on "the forgetting pill" which erases bad memories and wipe out some suffering. The forgetting pill is comparable to anti-depressants which are massively used to stimulate positive emotions, and it can be regarded as an inferior model of a Zero Suffering Operation.

<sup>25</sup> The result would be the same in a similar case, namely, organ trafficking: think of solitary, desperate and very old homeless people being kidnapped and killed. They are anaesthetised right in the middle of their sleep, do not understand that they are kidnapped or killed, and thus do not feel any physical and mental pain as a result. There is no one around to mourn for their loss. No suffering generated in total. If homeless people currently have net negative lives and will have net negative lives, a hedonistic utilitarian would not find this case problematic either.

<sup>26</sup> This thought experiment is to some degree similar to Robert Nozick's experience machine because both thought experiments show that hedonism backs delusion as a way out of suffering. Refer to Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 42-43.

who have chosen to undergo the Zero Suffering Operation would not suffer from those forms of exploitation. In that case, hedonistic utilitarianism would not submit that those forms of exploitation are morally wrong. In the absence of suffering, the forms of exploitation that the extremely poor are subject to should still be wrong. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, wronging is not necessarily indexed to harm. Those who exploit Hope are acting wrongly because they fail to respect Hope as a person and treat Hope as a mere means. Secondly, because of the Zero Suffering Operation, the extremely poor are confined to receive pleasure from whatever is done to them and thus those who are exploiting them are unjustly benefiting from the confinement of the extremely poor. In this case, the benefit that the exploiters receive is impermissible. Thirdly, it is not clear how one's pleasure or absence of a complaint from being wronged offsets the moral wrongness of that action. If there are happy slaves, should we keep them enslaved? It is not clear how this might be plausible.

Worse still, as imposing these operations would increase the overall welfare of the extremely poor by decreasing or eradicating their suffering, hedonistic utilitarianism can morally justify the imposition of medical operations like Zero Suffering Operation on the extremely poor. Even more repugnant, hedonistic utilitarianism can morally justify the enslavement of the extremely poor if the extremely poor enslaved have undergone the Zero Suffering operation. For instance, in a highly technological world where a bunch of powerful people have the ability to impose the Zero Suffering Operation on the extremely poor or drive them to choose it, they could enslave the extremely poor without committing any moral wrong. Alarming, hedonistic utilitarianism possesses a



totalitarian and paternalistic tendency which not only reduces the badness of extreme poverty to suffering but also disregards the moral agency of the extremely poor. Their agency is disregarded because hedonistic utilitarianism permits a few powerful people to treat the extremely poor as mere objects whose only function is thought to be cash-generating. Effective altruism founded on hedonistic utilitarianism would not recommend donating or reforming institutions to alleviate or end this slavery, instead it would recommend to maintain, increase, and subsidise these interventions on the extremely poor. In that case, effective altruism would problematise neither this slavery nor extreme poverty. The version of the world that effective altruism founded on hedonistic utilitarianism asks of us could be plainly despotic and dystopic.

Such implications of hedonistic utilitarianism are not only dangerous in and of themselves but also pose a great threat to the health of effective altruism as a movement. If effective altruism does not distance itself from hedonistic utilitarianism, it is likely that effective altruists will find themselves defending this repugnant conclusion of hedonistic utilitarianism. Hedonistic utilitarianism presents a very limited account of why extreme poverty is very bad and hence is not sufficient to comprehensively explain the badness of extreme poverty.

### 1.3.2 Hedonistic utilitarianism can morally justify the secret killing of the extremely poor

The second repugnant conclusion of hedonistic utilitarianism is that it can morally justify the secret killing of the extremely poor.

Take Singer's position on terminally ill patients. If the suffering that they are to experience would outweigh the happiness that they are to experience, Singer argues that the secret killing of patients in their sleep who suffer from terminal illnesses is morally justified even if it is against their will. Singer has two scenarios to establish this position.

In the first scenario, we have a friend who is a cancer patient, who agrees that "his life as it is now is not worth living" due to the pain, although our friend wants to continue living.<sup>27</sup> Hoping that it will be a cure, our friend requests juice from a cactus. Nonetheless, doctors unanimously agree that there is nothing to be done to prolong our friend's life. Our friend will live for another month or two, and the condition will keep deteriorating throughout. We have the opportunity to cease the pain altogether by a painless injection which can kill our friend during sleep. Since our friend is so weak, people will think that our friend had a natural death. Singer concludes that "the hedonistic utilitarian must say that, despite his desire to go on living, it would be better for him if he died now, and so killing him would be justified".<sup>28</sup>

In the second scenario which is the modification of the first, we have another friend. Just like in the first scenario, our friend is in discomfort and the days are numbered. Our friend lives in the Netherlands where euthanasia is legal. We discuss with our friend the option of being euthanised but our friend expresses a willingness to see Halley's comet next month. Our friend acknowledges that the happiness to be received from seeing it will

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<sup>27</sup> Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics*, 263.

<sup>28</sup> Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, 263.

not outweigh the suffering that has to be borne while waiting to see Halley's comet. However, our friend still has a desire to see it. Here, Singer raises the possibility that our friend may have a distinction between "higher" and "lower" pleasures, and thus commits himself to see Halley's comet. However, by believing that it is the totality of happiness and suffering that counts and that there cannot be a pleasure higher in quality when it is less pleasant, Singer rejects this distinction as Henry Sidgwick does. Then, Singer asserts that our friend is mistaken and concludes that "it is difficult to see how hedonism can avoid saying that it would be best if he died now, and killing him would, in the absence of indirect reasons against doing so, be justified".<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, as it is likely to incite fear and the occasions where it is morally justified are rare, Singer thinks that we need "strong prohibitions against killing people against their will".<sup>30</sup> Even so, the prohibitions that Singer proposes are only intended for public policy, and Singer indeed believes that it is morally justified to secretly kill those terminally ill patients.<sup>31</sup>

One objection may be that the extremely poor are not comparable to terminally ill patients who suffer, because many of the extremely poor are not going to die soon like terminally ill patients.

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<sup>29</sup> Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics*, 264.

<sup>30</sup> Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, 264.

<sup>31</sup> Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, 264. The stance that hedonistic utilitarianism would take in the homelesses example would be the same—that the secret killing of the solitary, desperate and very old homelesses who do not and will not have net positive lives is morally justified because there is no suffering generated in killing and net future suffering is prevented. Parallely, Singer would agree that the secret killing of the extremely poor against their will in their sleep -who are alone living in the massive distress of extreme poverty and have no prospect of overcoming their net future suffering- is morally justified as well.

So the idea may be that the leap from Singer's scenarios to the conclusion that hedonistic utilitarianism can morally justify the secret killing of the extremely poor does not work. In fact, there are extremely poor people living on the margins of survival either because of preventable diseases or because of malnutrition, deprivation and other forms of misery. But regardless of that fact, Singer's emphasis in the scenarios is not that our friends are going to die soon but that they are going to suffer a lot to the extent that their suffering will outweigh their happiness in their time ahead, however long that may be. In that respect, provided that more happiness-inducing alternatives are not available, and if we can find people who will have net future suffering and whose death will not create net future suffering, such as some of the extremely poor, then hedonistic utilitarianism can entail that the secret killing of them is morally justified.

But there will also be some extremely poor whose net suffering could be prevented. If it could be eliminated, and bring positive well-being into the world, the hedonistic utilitarianism would prefer that. But *how* it is prevented should be of utmost importance for us. For instance, if we can prevent their suffering by cash transfers and institutional support, then this is plausible. But there are other options. Suppose that we secretly kill a member of an extremely poor family to increase the collective well-being of other family members. There will be grief sometime because they would want that person alive. However, because of that person's death, the family needs to accumulate fewer resources to support themselves. As fewer resources are needed, in the long-term, the family will get out of extreme poverty and each and every member will lead much better lives. Killing one family member prevents the

net suffering of other family members. In this case, hedonistic utilitarianism again permits the secret killing of the extremely poor.

Moreover, there might be cases where hedonistic utilitarianism would permit the secret killing of the extremely poor, *even if* the net suffering of the extremely poor could be prevented. Suppose that A is an extremely poor person with a net balance of -10 (a life which is not worth living, because the net balance is below 0) and B is quite a rich person with a net balance of +100 (a superb life, certainly worth living). We could spend our resources on benefiting A (up to +1), which could bring about a difference of +11, and avoid net suffering. Our other option is spending our resources on benefiting B (up to +120), which could bring about a difference of +20. +20 is larger than +11. Having spent our resources on B, hedonistic utilitarianism would permit the secret killing of A. In this case, hedonistic utilitarianism does not prefer avoiding the net suffering of the extremely poor person even if it is avoidable, because the net benefit we could lend to B is greater.

Plainly, hedonistic utilitarianism renders the extremely poor who are already very disadvantaged in the society even more disadvantaged by morally permitting others to secretly kill them in the cases where they do not possess a good chance of experiencing more happiness than suffering in their future lives. This not only punishes them *because* they are disadvantaged but it also violates the autonomy of the extremely poor who have a desire to continue their lives. One might think that we do not punish them if their lives are not worth living and cannot be made worth living. But we punish them because even though they are exposed to prolonged suffering through no fault of their own and have a desire to keep living, hedonistic utilitarianism acts against the will of the

extremely poor just to increase the overall well-being in the world. It also punishes the extremely poor whose net suffering could be avoided—in the cases where benefiting a vastly better off person brings about more benefit, hedonistic utilitarianism does not prefer avoiding the net suffering of the extremely poor and permits killing them.

Both of the repugnant conclusions which render hedonistic utilitarianism unacceptable bring us to my argument that solely appealing to suffering in explaining the badness of extreme poverty entails undesirable implications for effective altruism. As effective altruism is a movement which aims to improve the world as much as it can, a form of effective altruism combined with hedonistic utilitarianism can imply that one of the most desirable ways of increasing the overall welfare of the human population including the extremely poor consist of (1) forcing the extremely poor to undergo medical operations like Zero Suffering Operation, and (2) secretly killing the extremely poor in specific cases where doing so decreases present and future suffering. When combined with hedonistic utilitarianism, effective altruism evolves to be an absurd approach to addressing extreme poverty. Such a form of effective altruism would be morally unhealthy, quite unpopular and unrealistic in many ways.

Essentially, all of these repugnant conclusions are due to the two key claims of hedonistic utilitarianism. The first is that what morally matters is pleasure and suffering, and that we should maximise net pleasure (or minimise net suffering). This is important: we might all agree that extreme poverty is very bad, but different accounts of its badness require different solutions to address extreme poverty. When we follow hedonistic utilitarianism, and

merge it with effective altruism, we may end up with the Zero Suffering Operation and these repugnant conclusions.

The importance of the points I have made in §1.3.1 and §1.3.2 are twofold. Firstly, they show us how hedonistic utilitarianism puts a greater burden on those who are already greatly burdened. Hedonistic utilitarianism is often discussed either in relation to individual preferences (how we should act in our daily lives) or in relation to possible worlds (which possible worlds are preferable over others), but not in relation to the disadvantaged communities who live on the margins of society. Once the demands of hedonistic utilitarians are thought in relation to the lives of the extremely poor, who are among the worst-off, they become increasingly concerning —this aspect of hedonistic utilitarianism is either not realised or widely discussed within effective altruism. Secondly, since there has been no evaluation of the philosophical accounts of explaining the badness of extreme poverty within effective altruism, the points made about hedonistic utilitarianism can potentially start this discussion. This is very important because different accounts of extreme poverty license different solutions to extreme poverty. That is, the account of explaining the badness of extreme poverty that effective altruism embraces inevitably determines what effective altruism offers as solutions.

Effective altruism is not a homogenous movement and has always tolerated a multitude of perspectives in any given issue. But, as shown, claiming that what makes extreme poverty very bad is *only* suffering and hence embracing hedonistic utilitarianism with respect to extreme poverty is a dangerous stance to take. If we are not satisfied with the outlook of hedonistic utilitarianism on extreme

poverty, we have to appeal to other morally significant reasons other than suffering to explain the badness of extreme poverty.

#### 1.4 Agency and dignity: morally significant reasons other than suffering

There are two leading moral approaches regarding the question of "What is morally significant?": one being *welfarism* and the other being *non-welfarism*. Welfarism only considers the welfare of beings as morally significant, and attaches importance to the components of life that increases one's welfare. Plainly, "the things that advance an individual's welfare are the things that advance her best interests, or benefit her, or make her life go better, or make things better for her, or make her better off in the most fundamental sense".<sup>32</sup> In other words, welfare can be anything that renders the lives of beings better, such as pleasure, happiness, utility, flourishing, and experiences that are positive.<sup>33</sup> According to Joseph Raz's "humanistic principle" which represents the main tenet of welfarism, "[T]he explanation and justification of the goodness or badness of anything derives ultimately from its contribution, actual or possible, to human life and its quality".<sup>34</sup> There many versions of welfarism one of which is hedonistic utilitarianism.

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<sup>32</sup> Simon Keller, "Welfarism," *Philosophy Compass* 4, no. 1 (2009): 82.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Moore and Roger Crisp, "Welfarism in moral theory," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74, no. 4 (1996): 599.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 194.



As a contrasting moral approach, non-welfarism appeals to morally significant reasons other than welfare.<sup>35</sup> Some of those morally significant reasons include achieving equality, providing justice and satisfying freedom. They are not morally significant qua welfare but for their sake.

To make the disagreement between welfarists and non-welfarists clear, consider an example of robbery. Non-welfarists can argue that stealing one's well-earned money from their pocket without being noticed is morally wrong, even though it does not decrease the welfare of the robbed at all. For non-welfarists, the robber did not deserve the money as the robbed deserved it in the first place, therefore stealing the money becomes morally unjustified. Welfarists can disagree, as it increases the welfare of the robber and harms no one. In this example, there is the concept of desert, but we do not always need to appeal to desert. We might have a right to something without deserving it, such as the right to education.

To briefly show what morally significant reasons we should appeal to other than suffering in explaining the badness of extreme poverty, I refer to the versions of non-welfarism presented by Alan Gewirth and Darrel Moellendorf who succeed in steering clear of the repugnant conclusions of hedonistic utilitarianism. Surely, there are many moral approaches which can keep away from the repugnant conclusions of hedonistic utilitarianism but the stances taken by Gewirth and Moellendorf are representative of deontic concerns related to the badness of extreme poverty, as well as being attractive in their own right.

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<sup>35</sup> Keller, "Welfarism," 91.

Gewirth subscribes to a rights-based theory. Gewirth argues that the extremely poor have a moral right to be assisted and this is a human right because getting out of extreme poverty enables the proper exercise of *agency* which is a necessary condition of human action. It is not to say that the extremely poor do not have any agency. It is merely to say that getting out of extreme poverty makes one freer, more likely to have a fulfilling life, and provide one with a greater set of options and opportunities which altogether lead to the proper exercise of agency. Gewirth attaches moral significance to agency by underscoring that it "must be fulfilled if [one] is to act in pursuit of any purposes".<sup>36</sup> Since extreme poverty "involves a humanly generated lack of the necessary goods of action, with severe constrictions of the abilities of agency", extreme poverty has to be addressed by reversing the violations of the economic and political system.<sup>37</sup> In that vein, assisting the extremely poor which allows them to live above the threshold of a minimally decent life is needed to satisfy minimal conditions through which they can have their agency protected. By presenting the case for agency, Gewirth provides us with a morally significant reason to regard extreme poverty as very bad without appealing to suffering.

Moellendorf subscribes to another version of non-welfarism, that is, global egalitarianism. Global egalitarianism states that equality has an intrinsic value, and merely aiming at improving the lives of the extremely poor is not ultimately desirable, equality has to

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<sup>36</sup> Alan Gewirth, "Duties to Fulfill the Human Rights of the extreme poor," in *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right*, ed. Thomas Pogge (Paris and Oxford: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Oxford University Press, 2007), 224.

<sup>37</sup> Gewirth, 228.

be aimed as well as improving the lives of the extremely poor.<sup>38</sup> As a global egalitarian, Moellendorf attaches importance to recognising the inherent dignity of humans in achieving equality while alleviating extreme poverty.<sup>39</sup> According to Moellendorf, dignity requires "equal respect" in which "any rule must receive hypothetical consent from all of those to whom it applies, and rules that assign benefits and burdens differentially will tend to be rejected, depending on the criteria of assignment and the constraints on consent".<sup>40</sup> In that manner, Moellendorf maintains that institutions have to abide by the norms which reflect respect, that is, "justificatory respect".<sup>41</sup> Justificatory respect implies that the principles governing the institutions have to be "reasonably endorsed by the persons" which would protect their dignity.<sup>42</sup> Establishment and supervision of justificatory respect preclude unjust conditions that may be accepted by the extremely poor who have no other chance, such as in the case of accepting a job offer from a sweatshop. Even though one assumes that sweatshops have the potential to diminish suffering by keeping the extremely poor away from malnutrition, health issues and debt, sweatshops are not morally permissible with regards to justificatory respect. Therefore, it is important to alleviate extreme poverty as extreme poverty undermines the dignity of the

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<sup>38</sup> Chris Armstrong, "Global Egalitarianism," *Philosophy Compass* 4, no. 1 (2009): 156.

<sup>39</sup> Darrel Moellendorf, "Absolute Poverty and Global Inequality," in *Absolute Poverty and Global Justice*, ed. Elke Mack, Michael Schramm, Stephan Klasen and Thomas Pogge (Routledge, 2009), Kindle edition, 123-124.

<sup>40</sup> Darrel Moellendorf, "Equal Respect and Global Egalitarianism," *Social Theory and Practice* 32, no. 4 (2006): 609.

<sup>41</sup> Moellendorf, 127.

<sup>42</sup> Moellendorf, 127.

people by forcing them to abide by the conditions that they would not otherwise abide by. By calling for the recognition of dignity, Moellendorf's global egalitarianism emphasises a morally significant reason to regard extreme poverty as very bad without appealing to suffering.

For effective altruists, there are three advantages of appealing to agency and dignity in explaining the badness of extreme poverty.

Firstly, by introducing morally significant reasons other than suffering such as agency and dignity, both versions of non-welfarism avoid the grotesque conclusions that extreme poverty without suffering is morally acceptable and in some cases the secret killing of the extremely poor is morally justified. Agency and dignity carry such a weight that they cannot morally permit imposing death on others simply because one thinks that the amount of suffering in their lives provides a sufficient reason to kill them. They are rigorous in the sense that they prohibit us to decide or act on someone's behalf against their will, especially when they are under conditions of severe pressure such as extreme poverty. If effective altruists appeal to agency and dignity as both versions of non-welfarism do, then the underlying moral commitments of effective altruism which are set to improve the lives of the extremely poor would be stronger.

Secondly, both versions of non-welfarism do not deem extreme poverty as a technical problem where only the suffering is remedied. Appealing to morally significant reasons as laid out by both versions of non-welfarism would save effective altruists from treating extreme poverty as a technical problem in which calculation and eradication of suffering are perceived to be the solution to extreme poverty. Relatedly, focusing on equality also allows us to condemn relative poverty and not only extreme poverty. By pointing

out to the injustices and inequalities prevailing in extreme poverty, effective altruists would be able to recognise problems other than suffering caused by extreme poverty, and they can orient effective altruism towards addressing them.

Thirdly, appealing to morally significant reasons other than suffering can foster progressive solutions against extreme poverty.<sup>43</sup> As mentioned before, sweatshops may be permissible for hedonic utilitarianism because having sweatshops which decreases the suffering of the extremely poor is better than not having them. But both versions of non-welfarism could agree that sweatshops are not morally justified as their exploitative features would harm the agency and the dignity of the extremely poor in many ways. Rather than morally permitting sweatshops in the occasional cases where the welfare of the extremely poor may increase, it is better to seek and build alternatives which would increase their welfare more than sweatshops and at the same time respect their agency and dignity. In that respect, by appealing to morally significant reasons other than the presence of suffering, both versions of non-welfarism have the potential to be much more progressive than hedonistic utilitarianism to alleviate extreme poverty.<sup>44</sup> Surely, effective altruists can benefit from the progressiveness of non-welfarism.

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<sup>43</sup> Such as encouraging to implement or improve labour laws, unions, working-led corporations, and to combat with tax evasions, and so on.

<sup>44</sup> One objection may be that hedonistic utilitarianism can still encourage to develop new and better economic and social opportunities for the extremely poor as they would increase their welfare, regardless of the fact that it deems sweatshops morally justified. It is true that hedonistic utilitarianism can still encourage to develop new and better economic and social opportunities for the extremely poor, but it would tend to be slow compared to both versions of non-welfarism since it is already pleased with the status quo in the cases where sweatshops increase net welfare.

## 1.5 Conclusion

Positing that extreme poverty is very bad is indisputable. Effective altruists are right to highlight the harms arising from extreme poverty and focus their attention on eliminating them. Nonetheless, in explaining why extreme poverty is very bad, this chapter has aimed to show that hedonistic utilitarianism brings about two repugnant conclusions. These repugnant conclusions include justifying extreme poverty if it is without suffering and the secret killing of the extremely poor. This is the negative part of my argument against effective altruists relying only on suffering to explain the badness of extreme poverty. On the positive side, I have also pinpointed morally significant reasons other than suffering, such as agency and dignity. They reveal that the badness of extreme poverty cannot be reduced to suffering as extreme poverty causes constraining, degrading and unfair conditions. In other words, suffering cannot be a "blanket concept" to explain why extreme poverty is very bad because conditions that extreme poverty imposes are not always related to suffering. In that respect, to comprehensively understand and progressively address the problems caused by extreme poverty, effective altruists have to recognise morally significant reasons other than suffering when regarding extreme poverty as very bad and leave hedonistic utilitarianism aside when explaining the badness of extreme poverty. Effective altruists have not spent a lot of time reflecting on why extreme poverty is bad. I suggest that this is a mistake and that I have tried to show why appeal to hedonistic utilitarianism should be undesirable for effective altruists in the context of extreme poverty.

Now that the first premise has been examined, I move to the second premise which aims to single out the moral obligations of individuals towards preventing very bad things, and particularly, extreme poverty.

## **Chapter 2**

# **The Moral Obligation to Alleviate Extreme Poverty**

### *Premise 2*

*If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it.*

## **2.1 Introduction**

Effective altruism has been inspired and reinforced by Peter Singer who has devoted almost an entire career to exploring and identifying the moral obligations of individuals concerning extreme poverty. Especially in the early stages of effective altruism when organisations like Giving What We Can were founded, effective altruists were largely following the philosophy of Singer. Although the moral commitments of Singer are not identical to the moral commitments of effective altruism, there are many overlaps between them.



In "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", which is a seminal article on our obligations regarding extreme poverty, Singer outlines two distinct moral principles regarding extreme poverty, which I call the *Stronger Principle of Sacrifice* and the *Weaker Principle of Sacrifice*, respectively.<sup>45</sup>

*The Stronger Principle of Sacrifice.* If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it.<sup>46</sup>

According to the Stronger Principle of Sacrifice, individuals ought to sacrifice everything except their necessities to alleviate extreme poverty. One of the prevalent objections to the Stronger Principle of Sacrifice is demandingness. The demandingness objection initially attacks act consequentialism. Critics claim that act consequentialism is implausible since it requires unrealistically high sacrifices from individuals.<sup>47</sup> Some think that act consequentialism carries the risk of being seriously detrimental to individuals by leading to alienation and the violation of integrity, and by ruling out the pursuit of self-interest and personal projects. Subsequently, the Stronger Principle of Sacrifice is also prone to the demandingness objection against act consequentialism. Singer has submitted a

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<sup>45</sup> Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 229-243.

<sup>46</sup> Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 231.

<sup>47</sup> Liam Murphy, "The Demands of Beneficence," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 22, no. 4 (1993): 268-269; Tim Mulgan, *The Demands of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 16; J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1973), 115-116; Stan van Hooft, *Cosmopolitanism: A Philosophy for Global Ethics* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2009), 88-90.

general response to the demandingness objection in which it is stated that individuals can still first take care of their interests because some degree of partiality is granted under a moral theory based on impartiality.<sup>48</sup> Regardless of the success or failure of the demandingness objection, in "Famine, Affluence and Morality", Singer pre-emptively articulated another principle to by-pass the demandingness objection, namely, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice.

*The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice.* If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it.<sup>49</sup>

The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice has not been studied as much as the Stronger Principle of Sacrifice mostly because Singer embraces the Stronger Principle of Sacrifice.<sup>50</sup> In the following, I focus on the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice because I regard it as one of the premises of effective altruism, and explain why I do so. I first show that, since it invokes the otherwise undefined notion of "moral significance", the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is open to interpretation, and I develop four interpretations of it. By doing this, I disaggregate the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice and show that it can be read in alternative ways. These different interpretations of moral significance are very important because they can radically change how we approach the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. I focus in on

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 210-215.

<sup>49</sup> Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 231.

<sup>50</sup> Singer, 241.

one specific interpretation of moral significance, and I argue that while the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice successfully assigns a moral obligation, its ambitions are minimal.

Showing that the ambitions of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice are minimal, I introduce three objections to the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice: (1) the permissiveness objection, (2) the source of responsibility objection, and (3) the lack of rights objection.

The permissiveness objection shows that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is an example of a moral principle which is overpermissive. An overpermissive moral principle asks individuals to do less than what they are actually morally required to do. In that sense, overpermissive moral principles are the opposites of overdemanding moral principles. I formulate the permissiveness objection by showing that Weaker Principle of Sacrifice justifies deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits.

The source of responsibility objection demonstrates that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice assigns the same degree of responsibility to those who have the same degree of ability to alleviate extreme poverty. But this neglects the other sources of responsibility other than mere ability: for instance, if individuals engage in morally wrong practices which exacerbate extreme poverty or unjustly benefit from worsening the lives of the extremely poor, then they should be liable for the wrongdoing and the harm brought about, which may take the form of compensation and restitution. In that case, those who owe compensation and restitution should be asked to redistribute more of their wealth, even if they have the same degree of ability to alleviate extreme poverty with those who have not engaged with morally wrong practices. Or, if the resources of those who deepen extreme poverty by

wrongdoing are sufficient enough to alleviate and eradicate extreme poverty, then perhaps only those who are responsible for their wrongdoings owe anything at all. These show that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice might be misleading in some cases.

The lack of rights objection stresses that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not assign moral rights to the extremely poor whereas it assigns a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty to individuals. Assigning moral rights to the extremely poor may have benefits such as recognising the agency of the extremely poor and empowering their collective consciousness, and failing to do so may weaken the stringency of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice itself.

Towards the end, I discuss what effective altruists could learn from these objections. I conclude that these objections are powerful enough to challenge the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice and thus effective altruism. Nevertheless, without abandoning the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, the complications of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice can be avoided by introducing additional moral principles which strengthen effective altruism.

All of the objections which are going to be discussed are comprised of relatively new and rarely discussed objections to the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice and effective altruism. These objections (or ideas which are closely related to them) might have been touched upon in the past by scholars but they have never been discussed in this length that I am going to discuss in the following in ways that directly implicate the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. For instance, philosophers tend to focus on the demandingness of moral obligations but not to the permissiveness of moral obligations. The literature is full of discussions around overdemandingness, but overpermissiveness is relatively unnoticed. For another example, the

defences of effective altruism often fail to recognise the distinction between the responsibilities emerging from mere ability and the responsibilities emerging from other sources like wrongdoing, unjust benefiting, etc. That is why the differences are rarely discussed, even though they are philosophically rich. Moreover, these objections and their constitutive concepts are not often discussed in relation to effective altruism. For instance, the concept of rights (which I will discuss through the lack of rights objection) is usually tied to the correlativity literature where the correlativity of the obligations of individuals and the rights of the extremely poor are discussed, but I try to tie the lack of rights objection to the agency of the extremely poor, and to the victimisation of the extremely poor, to which effective altruism is prone.

## 2.2 How should we interpret moral significance?

The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice says that we must prevent very bad things from happening unless this involves giving up something of "moral significance". This immediately raises the question of what counts as "morally significant". Singer never explicitly discusses what is meant by moral significance in the article in which the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is formulated, and I aim to unfold the term. There could be varying interpretations of moral significance. Nevertheless, we have to find the interpretation which would be suitable for the context of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice and effective altruism. I will not consider any non-welfarist interpretations of moral significance, as both Singer and other

effective altruists adopt a largely welfarist approach.<sup>51</sup> Here are four possible interpretations of moral significance:

1. Anything that increases or decreases one's welfare is morally significant, regardless of how tiny or large the amount of welfare is.
2. Anything that puts one's welfare above or below a critical level is morally significant.
3. Anything that considerably increases or decreases one's welfare is morally significant.
4. Anything whose welfare loss when sacrificed is sufficiently small relative to the welfare gain created is morally significant.

The first interpretation demonstrates that we could explain moral significance with respect to the mere existence of utility, regardless of the amount of it. This is a very broad interpretation of moral significance, which practically entails that things which create huge differences in one's welfare (such as getting the dream job) as well as infinitesimal differences (such as touching the water with a pleasant texture for a moment) could count as morally significant. Away from the context of effective altruism and the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, it seems plausible that human welfare is morally significant. If, without sacrificing *anything* (say, by clicking our fingers), we could make a person slightly better off, we at least seem to have some moral reason to do it. This suggests that utility, no

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<sup>51</sup> One might wonder whether a thing can be morally significant without having a considerable impact on one's welfare, and parallelly, whether moral significance can emerge from a *qualitative* source. For instance, can a childhood diary which is regarded as *special* be of moral significance even if its loss does not decrease one's welfare considerably? As I focus on a particular interpretation of moral significance which could be shared by many effective altruists, which is welfarist, I do not respond to that question.

matter how slight, is morally significant, for how could it ground a moral reason if it had no moral significance?

One may rightly expect that some utilitarians could be attracted to this interpretation because they think that all that matters spring from changes in welfare. In that respect, infinitesimal changes are *always* factored in as they are *always* morally significant —after all, they are changes in one's welfare, and they morally matter. If we think that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice considers any amount of utility to be morally significant, then it would be very hard to assign a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty because virtually any sacrifice could somewhat decrease individuals' actual or potential welfare. In that respect, taken to its extreme, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice would hardly demand anything of us, in terms of alleviating extreme poverty. As long as donating money would mean foregoing spending on *anything* that could produce *any* utility, we would be permitted not to donate. Having a room for justifying almost any spending means that individuals can exclude peculiar things from the domain of sacrifice even though it is implausible to exclude them. For instance, Carl Knight states that "Many adults have their own consumerist sources of happiness (however short-lived), and these sources also take on moral significance. And once this is accepted, one who endorses [the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice] can simply observe that aiding the global poor will almost always have some morally significant opportunity cost".<sup>52</sup> To illustrate Knight's point, since smelling perfumes' alluring scent relieves the tiredness of an enervating day, and since the appreciation of the scent gives one an increased

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<sup>52</sup> Carl Knight, "A Pluralistic Approach to Global Poverty," *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 4 (2008): 716.

motivation to continue the week, spending money on dozens of perfumes may be morally significant if a white-collar worker becomes increasingly dependent on perfumes. In that case, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice would not require the money spent on perfumes to be donated to a charity. This example shows that, if "moral significance" is tied to any amount of utility, even the moral significance attached to short-lived consumerist choices can outweigh the moral principle that individuals have a moral obligation to donate to alleviating extreme poverty. In that respect, despite the fact that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is formulated to provide individuals with a less demanding principle, it would cause another complication, that is, being overpermissive. In other words, if individuals can justify almost any spending that is morally significant thanks to the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, then the Weaker Principle becomes futile because it is almost unable to assign any moral obligation whatsoever.

Although, aside from the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, it is plausible to say that *any amount* of utility has moral significance, this interpretation is implausible as an interpretation of what Singer intends when including the notion of moral significance in the principle, or what effective altruists who endorse the principle take themselves to be endorsing.

This interpretation of moral significance is too broad and encourages people to overwhelmingly prioritise their own interests, and so Singer could not accept such an interpretation of moral significance. Moreover, if such an interpretation of moral significance is the correct one, then there is no point in formulating such a principle, because it is self-defeating.



In the second interpretation, moral significance becomes a threshold concept, one which is sensitive to a certain level of welfare, that is, surpassing a critical-level of welfare or being under a critical-level of welfare could be of moral significance. In that case, anything which helps one to surpass a critical-level of welfare or forces one to be under a critical-level of welfare could take on moral significance.

In the third interpretation, moral significance could be understood with respect to the amount of welfare gained or lost. Under this interpretation, the moral significance of a thing is correlated to that thing's impact on one's welfare.

To illustrate the difference, suppose that, under the second interpretation, anything that pushes our welfare above or below  $X$  is morally significant. We have a welfare of  $X-1$ . We do something and our welfare is now  $X+1$ . We gain 2 units of welfare. According to the second interpretation of moral significance, that thing is morally significant. Further suppose that we have a welfare of  $X-10$ . We do something, and our welfare increases to  $X-2$ . We gain 8 units of welfare, which can be regarded as considerable. According to the same interpretation of moral significance, this thing is not morally significant. However, according to the third interpretation, it is, because 8 units of welfare can be regarded as considerable. In this example, assessing the moral significance of things with respect to a critical level does not take into account the importance of the amount of welfare gained or lost, something with which Singer is not likely to agree.

The second and third possibilities are both compatible with what Singer might have had in mind, but arguably the third interpretation is closer to what is meant by moral significance in the

Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. This is because Singer does not mention any type of critical level and the standard connotation of moral significance for a utilitarian is likely to be associated with the amount of welfare and not with a critical threshold.

In the fourth interpretation, moral significance is "relativised" to what is at stake. If the welfare gap between what is to be sacrificed and what is to be gained is sufficiently small, then the thing to be sacrificed is morally significant. Hence, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not require that thing to be sacrificed. Likewise, if the welfare gap between what is to be sacrificed and what is to be gained is sufficiently large, then the thing to be sacrificed is not morally significant. Hence, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice requires that thing to be sacrificed. For instance, if we can massively improve the lives of an extremely poor person by only spending £10, and if that sacrifice infinitesimally decrease our welfare, then it is not morally significant and we should forgo it.

Nonetheless, this interpretation has its own problem in our context. Consider two cases where we receive a gift which is relatively cheap. In the first case, selling this gift and buying a gift with the money we gain for a friend of ours would increase the welfare of our friend by +2, and decrease our welfare by -1. In the second case, selling this gift would make us extremely sad (we value it so much, suppose that it is a gift from a loved one who is about to die) and decrease our welfare by -100 over years. We would think that we betray the memory of our loved one. But if we had sold it and donated it to charity, it would greatly benefit to some extremely poor person by +300. If we had sold our gift, we would not have been at the point of marginal utility and it would not have had a comparable importance. But this gift is still very valuable. This

relativised reading of moral significance would state that in the first case keeping that gift *is* morally significant whereas it is *not* morally significant in the second case, despite the fact that in the first case we only lose 1 unit of welfare and in the second case we lose 100 units of welfare. This seems odd from the perspective of the *agent*: no one would say the gift is morally significant in the first case and it is not in the second case. An objector might say that it is not odd from an *impartial* perspective because the net benefit is huge in the second case. This time this relativised interpretation of moral significance becomes overdemanding again because the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice would require us to sacrifice the gift we enormously value whose absence would make us extremely sad in the second case. Singer would want to avoid overdemandingness and this interpretation is open to leading to overdemanding conclusions.

The relativised reading of moral significance could only make sense in the cases where *we do not lose considerable amount of welfare* while at the same time creating a huge benefit to another person. For instance, if selling this gift and donating the money we gain to a charity decreases our welfare by -3 and increases the quality of life of an extremely poor person by +300, then we can safely conclude that this thing is not morally significant. But, to conclude that, we do not really need this relativised interpretation. We just need to regard something as morally significant only if it considerably increases or decreases one's welfare. This brings us back to the third interpretation.

In addition, recall the way that Singer introduces the notion of moral significance—"without thereby *sacrificing* anything else morally significant". Invoking sacrifice appears to suggest that we

should focus on *what the agent gives up* in interpreting moral significance, and *not* on an impartial view where what is morally significant is relative to what is at stake for others.

Hence, I assume that moral significance meant by Singer is the third interpretation. Given the welfarist approach of effective altruism mentioned, I assume that many of the effective altruists could also agree that moral significance should be correlated to the amount of welfare and that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice could easily support such an interpretation of moral significance. Consider the following examples reflecting this interpretation of moral significance:

1. Joy receives a *very high level of enjoyment* from hiking. Not being able to hike would lead Joy to major depression. Therefore, hiking is morally significant for Joy.
2. Regarding painting as indispensable to the *fulfilment of integrity*, Ash has a passion for painting since their childhood. Losing the ability to paint would leave Ash in a hellish situation. Therefore, painting is morally significant for Ash.
3. Devon is aware that having a relationship with their significant other gives them an *immense feeling of security* because of the exclusivity of their relationship. The deprivation of that immense feeling of security would make Devon extremely sad. Therefore, maintaining their relationship in its current form is morally significant for Devon.
4. River likes their house a lot because of its *precious memories*. The house gives them a lot of happiness. Not living in the same house in the rest of their life would bring about an

unendurable melancholy. Therefore, River's house is morally significant for River.

All of these examples have something in common: if a loss of a thing brings about a loss of a considerable amount of welfare, then it means that that thing is morally significant. These examples are meant to show what moral significance might look like in the real world under the third interpretation.

Indubitably, as demonstrated by the examples of Joy, Ash, Devon and River, different people have different morally significant things. In that respect, the notion of morally significant things has certain features similar to the notion of "basic materials for a valuable life".<sup>53</sup> According to James Griffin,

The notion of 'basic materials for a valuable life' has changed substantially with time. At first, for instance, it did not include literacy, then it did, and now it includes far more. It also varies from person to person. How someone, here and now, interprets 'par' will so much depend upon his generosity of spirit. Ask a man where the minimum level is whose own life is deeply satisfying and who is passionately committed to improving the human condition. Then ask a man whose own life is crabbed and who believes that men deserve no better. Of course, each might, if sharp enough, refuse to answer such an unclear question,

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<sup>53</sup> James Griffin, "Is Unhappiness Morally More Important Than Happiness?," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 114 (1979): 49.

but if they were willing to work with such a concept at all, then they might well give very different answers.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, both needs and desires can be morally significant. However, needs often have more moral significance than desires mostly because of their tremendous impact on welfare. Harry G. Frankfurt calls it "The Principle of Precedence".<sup>55</sup> According to the principle, needs have a "certain moral edge" in the competition between needs and desires.<sup>56</sup> It is not to say that there cannot be exceptions: suppose we start a project due to "an unreflective whim" in which we need "whatever is indispensable for completing the project".<sup>57</sup> Frankfurt states that the need to finish the project is not morally weightier than someone else's desire to finish it because we were initially unreflective. In short, morally significant things are not always needs—but if they are, then they are usually morally weightier than desires as they are likely to have more impact on one's welfare.

### 2.3 How can the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice be one of the premises of effective altruism?

The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice requires individuals to prevent something very bad from happening unless they sacrifice

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<sup>54</sup> Griffin, 49.

<sup>55</sup> Henry G. Frankfurt, "Necessity and Desire," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 45, no. 1 (1984): 3.

<sup>56</sup> Frankfurt, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Frankfurt, 3.

something of moral significance. Note that individuals are permitted to sacrifice something of moral significance, but they are simply not required to. Applied to extreme poverty, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice could entail that we have a moral obligation to donate to charities to prevent the worsening of the living conditions of the extremely poor as long as we do not sacrifice anything of moral significance.

Certainly, not all defences of effective altruism rely on the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. For instance, as stated before, Singer as an effective altruist opts for the Stronger Principle of Sacrifice and proposes the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice to those who find the former overdemanding. As another effective altruist, Theron Pummer states that we may not have an obligation to donate, but if we ever decide to donate, then we have a moral obligation to donate effectively if it is no costlier to us.<sup>58</sup>

Not all effective altruists share the same worldview either: according to a survey in 2017, 52.8% of effective altruists lean towards utilitarianism, 12.6% towards non-utilitarian consequentialism, 5.2% towards virtue ethics, 3.9% towards deontology, and 25.5% of effective altruists have "no opinion, or [are] not familiar with these terms".<sup>59</sup> While this survey may have had limitations such as some respondents potentially did not understand the terms properly, it nonetheless gives clues about the moral inclinations of effective altruists.<sup>60</sup> Given the diversity of moral

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<sup>58</sup> Theron Pummer, "Whether and Where to Give," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 44, no. 1 (2016): 84.

<sup>59</sup> William MacAskill, "The Definition of Effective Altruism," in *Effective Altruism: Philosophical Issues*, eds. Hilary Greaves and Theron Pummer (New York: Oxford University, 2019), 18-19.

<sup>60</sup> MacAskill, 19.

inclinations of effective altruists, effective altruists are very much likely to disagree on what should be counted as the premises of effective altruism.

This leaves us with competing versions of effective altruism. But the fact that there are competing versions of effective altruism does not mean that we cannot find a premise of effective altruism which could be appealing to many of the effective altruists. This is where the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice comes in: it strikes me as not wrong to state that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice could be one of the premises of effective altruism because it incorporates the widely shared moral inclinations of effective altruists. There are three reasons why the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice could be a commonly accepted premise of effective altruism.

Firstly, according to a 2017 survey, most of the effective altruists think of effective altruism as a moral obligation (56.5%) rather than an opportunity (37.7%).<sup>61</sup> The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice assigns individuals a moral obligation, which is in line with how most of the effective altruists deem effective altruism.

Secondly, MacAskill states that effective altruism is different from utilitarianism as it does not always require self-sacrifice:

It is true that effective altruism has some similarities with utilitarianism: it is maximizing, it is primarily focused on improving wellbeing, many members of the community make significant sacrifices in order to do more good, and many members of the community self-describe as utilitarians.

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<sup>61</sup> MacAskill, 16.



But this is very different from effective altruism being the same as utilitarianism. Unlike utilitarianism, effective altruism does not claim that one must always sacrifice one's own interests if one can benefit others to a greater extent.<sup>62</sup>

Effective altruism is often promoted as an accessible and practicable approach which is not overdemanding. It is no coincidence that most of the donation campaigns initiated by effective altruists target 10% of individual income rather than much more.<sup>63</sup> For some of the effective altruists, promoting effective altruism as an easy-to-commit moral approach may be a tactic to gain more followers, and for other effective altruists, it may be what effective altruism basically is. Likewise, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is formulated specifically to avoid any type of overdemandingness and individuals can follow the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice without sacrificing too much. It just asks individuals to sacrifice things that are not morally significant, and things which do not have any moral significance are likely to be sacrificed quite easily.

Thirdly, according to a 2015 survey, more than half of the prominent figures in effective altruism (52.5%) believe that effective altruism should be aligned with impartiality and welfarism.<sup>64</sup> The impartiality component is already embedded within the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice because it asks individuals to prevent

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<sup>62</sup> MacAskill., 19.

<sup>63</sup> Ordinarily, Giving What We Can asks its members to pledge 10% of their income to donate, and their seasonal donation campaigns also call individuals to donate 10% of their income.

<sup>64</sup> MacAskill, "The Definition of Effective Altruism," 18-19.

something very bad from happening, and that could easily allow prioritising others' interests whenever it is appropriate. Moreover, moral significance can be interpreted in welfarist terms as there is no restriction by the principle itself on how moral significance should be interpreted.

It is hard to find a moral principle which all effective altruists could identify as one of the premises of effective altruism.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, since the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice incorporates the moral inclinations of many of the effective altruists, it is probably as close as we will get to a widely endorsed principle.<sup>66</sup> In summary, the Weaker of Principle could be one of the premises of effective altruism because (1) it carries an obligation component with which many of the effective altruists already agree, (2) just like effective altruism itself, it is not overdemanding as it does not always require individuals to sacrifice their interests even if they could immensely benefit others, and (3) similar to many of the effective altruists, it favours impartiality since it requires individuals to take others' interests into account when a very bad thing can be prevented from happening, and it is open to be construed with welfarist terms as we can easily link moral significance to welfarism.

Now that I have clarified what is meant by moral significance and why it is a premise of effective altruism, I introduce three objections against the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice.

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<sup>65</sup> If you are unlikely to accept the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice as one of the premises of effective altruism, you can still regard it as one of the premises of a *version* of effective altruism. After all, the normative component of effective altruism is very much up for discussion. In that respect, you can consider this section as evaluating a version of effective altruism rather than evaluating all versions of effective altruism.

<sup>66</sup> Note that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice lacks the effectiveness requirement of effective altruism, which is why I have added another premise reflecting the effectiveness component of effective altruism to be discussed in Chapter 3.

## 2.4 The permissiveness objection

We have already seen that the first interpretation of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice was overpermissive, and so had to be rejected. I will now object that the third version, which is clearly more demanding than the first, is also overpermissive. Put differently, the permissiveness objection entails that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is overpermissive—the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is too weak because it asks too little. Relatedly, the permissiveness objection demonstrates that it incorrectly distributes moral burdens.

*The Permissiveness Objection.* The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is overpermissive because it unjustifiably exempts deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits from the domain of sacrifice, and puts a comparatively unjustifiable burden on those who have not deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits.

To analyse the permissiveness objection, we first need to understand what *lavish pursuits* are.

### 2.4.1 Lavish pursuits

Some rich individuals have lavish pursuits. Lavish pursuits are not necessities. They are high-end goods, experiences or actions often pursued for pleasure. They are extremely expensive. They do

not necessarily bring about considerable welfare to rich individuals and are not necessarily morally significant. But some of them may bring considerable welfare to rich individuals, and they might therefore be morally significant. However, if lavish pursuits had been sacrificed to benefit others like the worst-off, then their impact would be immense because the amount of resources reserved for lavish pursuits is tremendous. Regardless of the amount of welfare gains that rich individuals receive from lavish pursuits, I will argue, pursuing them is unjustifiable and they should be sacrificed for the benefit of others.

There can be a myriad of reasons why lavish pursuits are unjustifiable and should be sacrificed for the benefit of others. The first reason might be that whenever rich individuals have lavish pursuits, it means that they prioritise extreme self-interest where the principle of impartiality is severely violated. The second reason might be that having lavish pursuits is consequentially very bad, because the difference between the welfare gain that lavish pursuits bestows to rich individuals and the potential welfare loss of the worst-off who could have otherwise benefited from them being sacrificed for good is enormous.<sup>67</sup> The third reason might be that lavish pursuits may evoke a false sense of self-entitlement: rich individuals may think that they have the right to have lavish pursuits, although the money required by lavish pursuits might have been earned by exploitation, undeserved disadvantages or harm. In many cases, as the cost of lavish pursuits are very high, it is almost

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<sup>67</sup> Lavish pursuits could be condemned both by the third interpretation and the fourth interpretation of moral significance. They could be condemned by the third interpretation of moral significance because in most of the cases lavish pursuits are not morally significant because they do not bring about considerable welfare. They could also be condemned by the fourth interpretation because the welfare gap is huge.

unavoidable that the ability to have lavish pursuits have been gained through some sort of wrongdoing.

To better understand what lavish pursuits could be, consider the following:

Sacrifice A: prevent 1 person from contracting a moderate illness.

Sacrifice B: prevent 10 people from contracting a moderate illness.

Sacrifice C: prevent 100,000 people from contracting a moderate illness.

Sacrifice D: prevent 1,000,000 people from contracting a moderate illness.

Suppose that the welfare gain brought about by not sacrificing A, B, C or D each is a considerable amount for the rich individual. Moreover, the amount of welfare gain from each is the same. However, as we move from A to D, the cost of not sacrificing them also increases, because the number of people who could otherwise benefit from the sacrifice also increases from 1 to 1,000,000.

Essentially, this is a scale. I do not aim to spot the exact point where things become lavish pursuits. But as long as we agree that there is some point on this scale at which things become lavish pursuits, we would accept the existence of lavish pursuits.

Some of the real-life examples of lavish pursuits could include:

1. Renovating home with the latest extortionate furnishings each year,
2. Collecting very expensive antiquarian books,
3. Spending money on a private art collection consisting of famous painters of astronomical value,
4. Buying an extravagant private island for one's own usage.

These are not required for the survival of individuals. Moreover, currently, the amount of resources required by them are so high that spending on them becomes eminently inconsiderate in the face of global misery because of the reasons explained above. Therefore, these can easily be identified as lavish pursuits. These possessions and the experiences produced by them may or may not be of moral significance. If they bring about a considerable amount of welfare where their loss would have a considerable negative impact on the welfare of individuals, then they are morally significant. If not, then they are not.

Essentially, we have three levels of spending. The first level is spending on necessities. The second level is modest comforts which are not necessities but not lavish pursuits either, because they are not expensive. Referring to the above scale, think of sacrificing A. Let A be a non-expensive bus ticket for the place where we will start our trekking experience. Perhaps if we had sacrificed our trekking experience (which could only be actualised through buying that non-expensive bus ticket), then we could have prevented one person from contracting a mild illness. A can be regarded as a modest comfort. The third level of spending is lavish pursuits.<sup>68</sup> Any

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<sup>68</sup> I only focus on the wrongness of the third level. Some consequentialists may be rightly tempted to show the wrongness of the second level as well, but it is not in the scope of this chapter.

plausible theory of morality which is against extreme self-prioritisation can grant that there are lavish pursuits, and that they are unjustifiable, and that they have to be sacrificed for the benefit of others.

Demonstrably, not all lavish things are lavish pursuits. An expensive computer bought by a graphic designer is not a lavish pursuit if the graphic designer needs it to make ends meet in a competitive society. The minimally decent life of the graphic designer can be contingent on that expensive computer because of the ever-increasing aggressiveness of the graphic design industry which condemns graphic designers who do not have specific computers to low earning prospects and deprivation. Therefore, buying an expensive computer does not amount to pursuing a lavish pursuit in this example.

Note that lavish pursuits cannot be used as a synonym for *expensive tastes*. According to the generic explanation, those who possess expensive tastes "need more income simply to achieve the same level of welfare as those with less expensive tastes".<sup>69</sup> The existence of expensive tastes poses a problem for finding the currency of equality. Philosophers have discussed to what extent we should be compensating for expensive tastes if their absence leads to a serious reduction in one's welfare, whether deliberately cultivating expensive tastes makes any moral difference, and they have pondered over the relationship between expensive tastes and

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<sup>69</sup> Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 10, no. 3 (1981): 228.

non-expensive tastes.<sup>70</sup> The expensive tastes problem is often used as a leverage to defend equality of *resources* rather than equality of *welfare*.

Lavish pursuits are different from expensive tastes in many ways. Firstly, in defining lavish pursuits, we do not have to compare the needs of people to understand the average amount of resources to reach a given level of welfare. Normally, to understand what expensive tastes are, we require a "resource benchmark" set by the majority.<sup>71</sup> But we do not need a resource benchmark to identify lavish pursuits. Secondly, pursuing lavish pursuits is *always* morally wrong because it requires vast resources in a world where there is global misery. But the moral wrongness of pursuing expensive tastes (even pursued deliberately) is disputed. One may argue that pursuing expensive tastes is not always morally wrong because it may be the only option of individuals to not have a large welfare deficit: individuals who need to pursue expensive tastes to not have a large welfare deficit are comparatively unlucky in the sense that they cannot pursue their tastes with fewer resources.<sup>72</sup> Thirdly, the amount of resources demanded by expensive tastes does not necessarily match with the resource demand of lavish pursuits. For instance, some may need to watch an additional movie each month

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<sup>70</sup> For a neat discussion, refer to G. A. Cohen, "Expensive Taste Rides Again," in *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice, and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. Michael Otsuka (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University, 2011), 81-115; Carl Knight, "Egalitarian Justice and Valuational Judgment," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 6, no. 4 (2009): 482-498.

<sup>71</sup> Louis Kaplow, "Choosing Expensive Tastes," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 36, no. 3 (2006): 418.

<sup>72</sup> G. A. Cohen, "Expensive Taste Rides Again," 99. For a critical response, refer to Rasmus Sommer Hansen and Søren Flinch Midtgaard, "Sinking Cohen's Flagship — or Why People with Expensive Tastes Should not be Compensated," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (2011): 341-354.



to satisfy their cultural appetite and that additional movie can be classified as an expensive taste because more cultural exposure is needed than average. But the resources allocated to that additional cultural exposure may not be vast and thus expensive tastes may not be expensive in the sense that they are luxurious. Conversely, lavish pursuits are in each case luxurious.

One similarity of lavish pursuits with expensive tastes is that the inability to access lavish pursuits does not always correspond to a considerable reduction in welfare, and in some cases, individuals can even find non-lavish pursuits to compensate for their loss of welfare. Surely, the loss of lavish pursuits may also lead to a considerable reduction in welfare, if the welfare brought about by lavish pursuits is high enough. Likewise, there are expensive tastes which may lead to a considerable reduction in welfare if they are not pursued, as well as some other expensive tastes which do not.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, given their differences, this similarity is not sufficient to use lavish pursuits and expensive tastes interchangeably.

#### 2.4.2 Unjustifiable broadness and comparatively unjustifiable burden

Now that the term lavish pursuits is clear, I can explain the permissiveness objection. Consider *First Couple*.

*First Couple*. Twice a year, the first couple is asked by a travel agency whether they want to go on a luxurious vacation which is specifically designed for them.

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<sup>73</sup> Cohen, *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice, and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, 102.

Luxurious vacations take place at the lovely coastal resort where they met years ago. Since they are quite a rich couple, they can easily afford luxurious vacations. This is the tenth year that they have been offered these luxurious vacations. Each time, they have accepted the offer. The first time they went on one of these luxurious vacations, they were only slightly happier. Nonetheless, over the years, they have deliberately cultivated a habit of going on these luxurious vacations, and the impact of them on their welfare dramatically increased. They have even started to regard going on these luxurious vacations as special, exclusive and incomparable. They have reached the point where not going on these luxurious vacations has become morally significant because the extent of the loss of welfare would be considerable. As expected, with the resources that they have used for their luxurious vacations, they do nothing for extreme poverty.

We can easily recognise their luxurious vacations as lavish pursuits, and they have been deliberately cultivated. Deliberate cultivation is a process where we accumulate certain patterns, habits and behaviour by repeating our actions. For instance, in explaining the aesthetic experience, Kevin Melchionne writes that "My repeated satisfaction ( $taste_1$ ) in, say, viewing the paintings of Cézanne means that I have an overall taste ( $taste_2$ ) for Cézanne. Liking the work of Cézanne is part of my biographical taste, my aesthetic personality. Accumulated aesthetic experiences compose

my sense of myself as an aesthetic person".<sup>74</sup> Just as we compose our aesthetic personality through repeated satisfaction, we compose our moral personality through the actions we deliberately cultivate.

The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not assign a moral obligation to prevent something very bad like extreme poverty to the first couple with the resources reserved for their lavish pursuits. The reason is simple: these lavish pursuits are of moral significance (they bring about considerable amount of welfare to the first couple) and the first couple is not required to sacrifice them to benefit the lives of others—by deliberately cultivating the habit of going on luxurious vacations, they simply have raised the bar too high. Although it is true that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice would condemn the early trips, through which the cultivation took place, it cannot condemn the vacations they take *now* because going on these vacations has become morally significant over time. But this is odd—*just because* someone has deliberately cultivated a morally significant lavish pursuit, they are no longer bound by the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. This is why the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is overpermissive.

This is also evident in the examples that Singer uses. Singer draws attention to ". . .the superrich, people who spend their money on palatial homes, ridiculously large and luxurious boats, and private planes".<sup>75</sup> Then, Singer states that "But for conspicuous waste of money and resources it is hard to beat Anousheh Ansari, an Iranian-American telecommunications entrepreneur who paid a reported

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<sup>74</sup> Kevin Melchionne, "On the Old Saw 'I know nothing about art but I know what I like'," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68, no. 2 (2010): 132.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, 9.

\$20 million for eleven days in space".<sup>76</sup> Clearly, the mentioned luxuries and self-funded space travel are lavish pursuits. Given that pursuing lavish pursuits is morally wrong, Singer is right that spending on these is morally wrong. We can directly assume that spending on them is morally wrong with respect to the *Stronger* Principle of Sacrifice since it requires individuals to sacrifice everything to the level of marginal utility. However, we cannot directly assume that spending on the mentioned luxuries and self-funded space travel is morally wrong with respect to the *Weaker* Principle of Sacrifice because the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice can morally permit spending on them if they are morally significant. For instance, if self-funded space travel fulfils one's vehement desire of experiencing the space and brings about immense happiness, it can well be of moral significance. In that respect, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice can permit self-funded space travel regardless of the amount of resources reserved for it.

Clearly, the extensive broadness of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is unjustifiable and weakens the stringency of the moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty. The extensive broadness of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice evokes what Henry Shue calls "yuppie ethics".<sup>77</sup> Yuppie ethics is buttressed by the claim that individuals have a right to satisfy their desire to have extravagant and superfluous experiences such as having "gourmet dinners -as part of the 'good life'- which is taken to override even the right of helpless children to adequate nutrition".<sup>78</sup> As nicely explained by Iason Gabriel, "[Yuppie ethics] holds that morality contains a set of

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<sup>76</sup> Singer, 9.

<sup>77</sup> Henry Shue, "Mediating Duties," *Ethics* 98, no. 4 (1998): 697.

<sup>78</sup> Shue, 697.

radical permissions or entitlements that provide people with near total insulation against the positive moral claims of others, such that it would not be wrong to wrong to [sic] deny them life-saving resources when one could alternatively acquire high-end goods for oneself".<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the permissiveness objection exhibits that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice has the capacity to accommodate yuppie ethics. What is odd about the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice here is that it does not care *how* many people we could help. Once we hit the required amount of welfare which would affect us considerably, that thing becomes morally significant, and we are off the hook.

The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice causes another complication, which is linked to its overpermissive nature. The complication is that it brings about comparatively unjustifiable burdens. Consider *Second Couple*.

*Second Couple.* Twice a year, the second couple is asked by a travel agency whether they want to go on a luxurious vacation which is specifically designed for them. Luxurious vacations take place at the lovely coastal resort where they met years ago. Since they are quite a rich couple, they can easily afford luxurious vacations. Each time, they have rejected the offer, and they are aware that luxurious vacations could make them infinitesimally happier. Not going on these luxurious vacations does not mean that they have to sacrifice something morally significant since not going on them does not affect their welfare considerably.

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<sup>79</sup> Iason Gabriel, "The Problem with Yuppie Ethics," *Utilitas* 30, no. 1 (2018): 32.

They have always stressed the importance of using their resources more wisely and donated their money which they could have spent on these luxurious vacations. This is the tenth year that they have been offered these luxurious vacations and this is the tenth year that they have been donating their money to extreme poverty charities.

Think of the first couple in relation to the second couple. Surprisingly, neither the second couple nor the first couple violates the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. Violating the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice amounts to failing to fulfil the moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice assigns. Despite the fact that the second couple donate their money and the first couple go on a luxurious vacation, how is it possible that neither couple violates the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice?

The second couple meet the first condition of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, that is, having an ability to alleviate extreme poverty. Moreover, even though their money could have been spent for luxurious vacations, donating to a charity does not mean that they sacrifice something morally significant as their welfare is not considerably affected by their decision of not going on luxurious vacations. In that respect, they also meet the second criterion of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice because they do not sacrifice something morally significant by not going on a luxurious vacation. Since both of the conditions of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice are met, they have a moral obligation to prevent something very bad, namely, extreme poverty. They fulfil their moral obligation by

donating to a charity, and thus they do not violate the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice.

Like the second couple, the first couple also meet the first condition of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice by having an ability to alleviate extreme poverty. Nevertheless, they do not satisfy the second condition which is necessary for them to be assigned with a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty. Since they would have sacrificed something morally significant if they had not gone on luxurious vacations, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is not applicable to them. In that case, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not assign them a moral obligation to sacrifice their lavish pursuit and donate the amount of money that they would otherwise have kept from what they had sacrificed, even though they are only different than the second couple by virtue of deliberately cultivating a lavish pursuit which has become morally significant over time. As a result, the first couple who have a morally significant lavish pursuit do not violate the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice since the moral obligation drawn from it does not bind them in the first place.

Now, how should we understand the comparatively unjustifiable burden with regards to the first couple and the second couple? Although they have the same ability to alleviate extreme poverty by donating to extreme poverty charities, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice assigns a moral obligation to the second couple but not to the first couple. The second couple is comparatively unjustifiably burdened not because that they are overburdened. In fact, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not overburden them as it requires the second couple to make a minimal sacrifice, that is, to avoid going on luxurious vacations. They would be required to make that minimal sacrifice anyway regardless of

what the first couple do. Parallely, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not ask the second couple to sacrifice or risk sacrificing their lives, the majority of their pleasures, or their integrity. Nonetheless, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice appeals to moral significance *alone* to decrease the burden of individuals to alleviate extreme poverty. It follows that the second couple is comparatively unjustifiably burdened because the first couple who have the same ability to alleviate extreme poverty are exempt from sacrificing their lavish pursuit *solely* on the basis of their possession of a morally significant lavish pursuit.

One may wonder that if both of the couples are initially able to deliberately cultivate their lavish pursuits, where does the comparatively unjustifiable burden lie? After all, both of the couples had an equal chance of deliberately cultivating morally significant lavish pursuits: the first couple have deliberately cultivated their lavish pursuits and the second couple have not. The comparative unjustifiable burden does not lie in the unequal distribution of initial chances as there is no unequal distribution of initial chances at all. It comes from the oddness of taking into account deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits to decrease one's burden to alleviate extreme poverty. Lavish pursuits should not have been pursued and should not have been made morally significant in the first place. But if these have been done, then they should not be used as a leverage to decrease one's burden to alleviate extreme poverty. Likewise, the first couple should not be left off the hook just because they have deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits. If we accept that they should be left off the hook, then they are permitted to spend on everything which is morally significant



despite the fact they have deliberately cultivated their lavish pursuits which have become morally significant over time.

A related complication which follows is that individuals who have deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits and do not attempt to stop doing that would not be required to reserve their resources which are used for lavish pursuits to alleviate extreme poverty. It means that those who are morally better (those who have not deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits) are required to do more whereas others who are morally worse (those who have deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits) are left unnoticed. The former is morally better because they have not chosen to deliberately cultivate morally significant lavish pursuits and they abide by the moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty. The problem here is not about expecting the promises made by those who are morally better to be delivered when they are bound by a moral obligation. We can rationally expect the promises made by those who are morally better to be delivered whenever they are bound by a moral obligation. The problem is that when we come across with those who are morally worse (such as the first couple) we do not bind them by a moral obligation and do not expect anything of them. Such a conclusion goes against the plausible idea that we have to prioritise those who are morally worse rather than those who are morally better in correcting behaviour. What we do is we are expecting *more* from those who are morally better and *less or none* from those who are morally worse, just because the scope of the moral obligation we have formulated does not cover those who are morally worse.

One may rightly wonder why those who are morally worse are not required to put an end to deliberately cultivating lavish pursuits.

While it is convincing that individuals who have stopped deliberately cultivating their morally significant lavish pursuits out of moral considerations have a moral obligation to sacrifice the resources that they once reserved for their morally significant lavish pursuits, it is implausible to think that individuals who have deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits but do not strive to eliminate them should pursue their morally significant lavish pursuits and be permitted to do nothing to get rid of them. Hence, a comparatively unjustifiable burden is imposed on those who are morally better when the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice excludes deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits from the domain of sacrifice.

The permissiveness objection is valid whenever there are morally significant lavish pursuits. But it does not mean that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is overpermissive *in general*—it is overpermissive in specific cases where there are lavish pursuits. In that respect, the obligation that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice assigns should be deemed minimal rather than definitive. That is also why effective altruists should add another moral principle to avoid these complications and use it beside the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. *The Principle of Permissiveness* may do the work.

*The Principle of Permissiveness.* Individuals ought not to follow their deliberately cultivated lavish pursuits, even if they are morally significant.

The Principle of Permissiveness does not let the moral value of pursuing lavish pursuits outweigh the moral value of alleviating extreme poverty. As opposed to the Principle of Permissiveness, the

Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does that. Therefore, if the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is to be followed, it has to be supported by the Principle of Permissiveness.

## 2.5 The source of responsibility objection

In the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, as it starts with the clause "If it is in our power", there is an emphasis on the *mere ability* to alleviate extreme poverty, while the *source of responsibility* of alleviating extreme poverty is ignored.

The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice has a narrow focus in assigning a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty—it correlates the degree of mere ability with the degree of responsibility that one has towards alleviating extreme poverty. Nonetheless, this neglects the fact that responsibility could emerge separately from mere ability: surely, there could be many different sources of responsibility apart from mere ability. Consider the following questions: does one's responsibility to alleviate extreme poverty come from a wealth which has been gained justly or does it come from the exploitation of others? Does it come from taking advantage of the inequalities generated by the political and economic system? Does it come from bringing about harm or letting others harm? Does it come from negligence? Does it come from luck? All of these point to different sources of responsibility. The merit of asking these questions is to better understand the distribution of responsibility among individuals who ought to alleviate extreme poverty. After all, the ability to alleviate extreme poverty may have been gained through some wrongdoing which has favoured some individuals while exacerbating the conditions of the extremely poor where those

who have contributed to that would be more responsible than other individuals who have the same ability to alleviate extreme poverty. In the case of rich cronyists who spoil the material resources of the extremely poor, the ability to alleviate extreme poverty comes from unjustly benefiting from exploitation. In the case of political actors gaining enormous wealth from corruption, the ability to alleviate extreme poverty comes from the ambition of power which harms the extremely poor. In the case of the stakeholders of companies which devastate the global ecosystem, the ability to alleviate extreme poverty comes from letting the extremely poor under famine and drought. In the case of ordinary members of society with tremendous wealth which has been possessed out of luck, the ability to alleviate extreme poverty comes from not sharing the arbitrarily distributed advantages.

Being insensitive to these different sources of the responsibility to alleviate extreme poverty may result in (1) treating those who have gained their wealth by contributing to and unjustly benefiting from extreme poverty as morally equivalent to those who have not or those who have not to the same degree, and (2) failing to recognise the possibility of having responsibility towards alleviating extreme poverty without having any ability whatsoever. That is the gist of the *Source of Responsibility Objection*.

*The Source of Responsibility Objection.* The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice assigns the same degree of responsibility to individuals who have the same ability to prevent something very bad even if some of them have contributed to or unjustly benefited from that very bad thing, and it assigns no responsibility to those who

have contributed to or unjustly benefited from that very bad thing if they lack ability.

To make the objection clear, consider several examples.

*Philanthropy Company.* There is a for-profit organisation called the Philanthropy Company which offers consultancy services to people, companies, institutions and governments to do philanthropic work more effectively for the extremely poor. Out of good faith, one of the very hard-working researchers of the Philanthropy Company, who was very poor and unlucky in the past, does some very successful and diligent research to alleviate extreme poverty, which has led the wage of the researcher to soar. Living a minimalistic life, the researcher has shared millions with the extremely poor by donating to charities. The researcher has still the ability to donate £1,000,000 to alleviate extreme poverty without sacrificing anything morally significant.

*Successful Profit-Seeker.* A rich company owner decides to deplete the water resources with the high hopes of making a profit while many of the extremely poor will be condemned to drought. The endeavour becomes successful and the rich company owner makes a profit. The successful profit-seeker now has

the ability to donate £1,000,000 to alleviate extreme poverty without sacrificing anything morally significant.

*Good Luck.* A poor university student has recently inherited a tremendous wealth from an unknown distant relative. The university student is no longer poor, and now has the ability to donate £1,000,000 to alleviate extreme poverty without sacrificing anything morally significant.

According to the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, since all of these parties have the same degree of ability, they have the same degree of responsibility.<sup>80</sup> They all have to allocate £1,000,000 to alleviate extreme poverty. Surely, this cannot be true, as some of these parties should have more responsibility and thus pay more. That is why we need to go beyond the mere ability framework of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice.

The researcher of the Philanthropy Company does not deepen extreme poverty. In fact, the researcher of the Philanthropy Company is working to ameliorate the lives of the extremely poor. Moreover, the researcher has allocated millions to alleviate extreme poverty. The type of responsibility that the researcher has is linked to *mere ability*. As discussed before, according to this approach, we are required to sacrifice anything that is not morally significant if we could prevent something very bad. The researcher earns immensely and is under this type of responsibility.

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<sup>80</sup> Here, I use the term responsibility in terms of the amount of required payment. If one has a greater responsibility, one has to pay more.

In contrast, the successful profit-seeker deepens extreme poverty and unjustly benefits from extreme poverty through wrongdoing and did nothing in the past to alleviate extreme poverty. Although both the researcher and the successful profit-seeker have the same amount of monetary power -£1,000,000- to alleviate extreme poverty without sacrificing anything morally significant, the latter has more responsibility and the source of responsibility is also different. The type of responsibility that the successful profit-seeker has is not only linked to mere ability, but also linked to *wrongdoing*. In the case of wrongdoing, the successful profit-seeker has an additional moral obligation to redistribute to compensate for the loss brought about. Here, the responsibility emerging from mere ability and the responsibility emerging from wrongdoing should be separated, and the Weaker Principle fails to do so.

This is also evident in Singer's proposed scaled donation scheme. According to this scaled donation scheme, individuals who earn between \$105,001-\$148,000 a year are asked to donate 5% of their earnings.<sup>81</sup> The responsibility of individuals who earn between \$105,001-\$148,000 a year through wrongdoing such as producing extremely toxic substances which harm the health of the extremely poor is way greater but they are not given an additional donation requirement. They would be required to donate the same as the individuals who earn between \$105,001-\$148,000 a year by doing social work which does not cause the extremely poor to suffer. Given that the sources of their responsibility are vastly different, individuals who earn money through wrongdoing have to be asked a substantially higher amount of money to donate. But the scaled donation scheme, just like the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, is so

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<sup>81</sup> Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, 6.

narrow in its scope that it cannot draw a line between different sources of responsibility.

In *Good Luck*, things are a bit different. The university student is again bound by the moral obligation assigned by mere ability. Moreover, the university student is also under a responsibility to share the good luck received because the university student did not deserve the wealth inherited and the good luck in the first place.

Suppose that to eradicate extreme poverty, we need a final amount of £1,000,000. According to the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, since they have the same ability, the researcher and the university student each owe £500,000 to alleviate extreme poverty. Such a conclusion fails to recognise past actions. The researcher, who had a poor life in the past and owed most of the wealth earned to hard-work, has already donated millions, whereas the university student could not because of past inability (but not past refusal to contribute, because the university student did not have any considerable wealth in the past). But, thanks to luck, the university student now has the ability to alleviate extreme poverty with £1,000,000 without sacrificing anything morally significant. Since the researcher has already donated an immense amount of money in the past and that the researcher is actively working to alleviate extreme poverty, the obligation to provide the final amount should fall upon the university student because of luck. Requiring £500,000 from each would not only be insensitive to the distribution of luck but also past actions. It would be insensitive to luck distribution because it would ask the same from the one who had been unlucky but gained wealth through hard-work and the one who had been unlucky but owed all of the inherited wealth to luck. It would also be insensitive to past actions because the researcher has already donated millions,



but the university student did not. The Weaker Principle fails to do such a prioritisation: it treats both parties as equals and asks the same, although the university student should cover the final amount.

A more plausible response would be to list the past actions of parties who have the same ability to alleviate extreme poverty, and assign more responsibility to those who have not done anything or have done less to alleviate extreme poverty. In that case, the university student would have more responsibility as well. Once we calculate, perhaps we will understand that only the resources of those who have not acted in accordance with their respective degrees of responsibility would suffice to eradicate extreme poverty.

Finally, consider *Unsuccessful Profit-Seeker*.

*Unsuccessful Profit-Seeker.* A rich company owner decides to deplete the water resources with the high hopes of making a profit where many of the extremely poor will be condemned to drought. The endeavour becomes unsuccessful and the rich company owner goes bankrupt.

The unsuccessful profit-seeker has currently no ability whatsoever to alleviate extreme poverty because of bankruptcy. But the type of responsibility that the unsuccessful profit-seeker is under is linked to the wrongdoing of depleting the water resources. Since the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is only concerned with those who have the ability to alleviate extreme poverty, it cannot assign any

moral obligation to the unsuccessful profit-seeker. The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is also insufficient in this regard.<sup>82</sup>

In the cases of *Successful Profit-Seeker* and *Unsuccessful Profit-Seeker*, both profit-seekers have responsibility. For the unsuccessful profit-seeker, there was a responsibility not to make a profit by depleting water resources. But since this has been violated, the unsuccessful profit-seeker now owes a compensation which is another responsibility. For the successful profit-seeker, it is the same with a twist: apart from sharing all of the responsibilities that the unsuccessful profit-seeker has, the successful profit-seeker has an *additional* responsibility with regards to the unjust enrichment. The successful profit-seeker has to give up the unjust enrichment and redistribute it because it has been gained through exploiting injustices and inequalities. In other words, the successful profit-seeker not only owes compensation for the loss of the extremely poor but also owes restitution to the extremely poor because of unjust enrichment. The difference between compensation and restitution is made clear by Todd Calder:

While the purpose of compensation is to rectify a plaintiff's unjust loss, the purpose of restitution is to rectify a defendant's unjust gain. For instance, if you smash into my car, you owe me compensation for the damage done to my car. You must compensate me for

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<sup>82</sup> An objector might say "Ought implies can" so that we should not assign responsibilities to those who lack ability. A response might be that those who are responsible should be asked to give up morally significant things. Moreover, even if they do not have any sort of ability *now*, we can still ask them to fulfill their obligation to alleviate extreme poverty *once* they regain their ability. Therefore, thinking that they are responsible (even if they do not any sort of ability now) helps us to understand what they ought to do in the future.

my unjust loss. If instead you make a profit by performing a song I wrote without my consent, you owe me restitution for the profit you have made from the unjust use of my property. You must give up your unjust gain.<sup>83</sup>

The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice recognises that the successful profit-seeker has an obligation to alleviate extreme poverty (though it recognises the successful profit-seeker's responsibility insufficiently, because it only focuses on mere ability). But it does not recognise that the unsuccessful profit-seeker has an obligation to alleviate extreme poverty *because* the unsuccessful profit-seeker does not have any ability. Instead, we should say that because of the harms brought about, the unsuccessful profit-seeker is under a serious responsibility to alleviate extreme poverty, *despite the fact that* unsuccessful profit-seeker does not have any current ability to alleviate extreme poverty. This is practically important because if one day in the future the unsuccessful profit-seeker gains some enormous wealth, we would ask the unsuccessful profit-seeker to pay more to alleviate extreme poverty as opposed to others who have the same amount of ability but not contributed to extreme poverty. But, if we follow the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, we would still ask the same from the unsuccessful profit-seeker and others.

As a summary, we have the following:

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<sup>83</sup> Todd Calder, "Shared Responsibility, Global Structural Injustice, and Restitution," *Social Theory and Practice* 36, no. 2, (2010): 270-271.

1. Responsibility because of mere ability: *Philanthropy Company*.
2. Responsibility because of wrongdoing (with ability): *Successful Profit-Seeker*.
3. Responsibility because of luck (with ability): *Good Luck*.
4. Responsibility because of wrongdoing (without ability): *Unsuccessful Profit-Seeker*.

In a nutshell, the source of responsibility objection states that if the parties all have the same ability in terms of monetary power (1, 2, and 3), then the Weaker Principle assigns the same level of responsibility to them, which is shown to be wrong. Moreover, due to the narrow scope of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, 4 is not recognised where responsibility could emerge without ability.

Being aware of the different sources of responsibility is important because it shows one of the important limitations of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice: in assigning moral obligations, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is insensitive to the different sources of responsibility and solely focuses on mere ability. To avoid such a problem and the complications discussed, we have to accept a principle to back up the Weaker of Principle of Sacrifice, which is the *Source of Responsibility Principle*.

*The Source of Responsibility Principle.* Individuals who have a greater responsibility ought to allocate greater resources to prevent something very bad from happening, even if they share the same degree of ability with other individuals who have lower or no responsibilities.

One may ask the point of assigning increased levels of responsibility and thus increased levels of redistribution to those who have contributed to or unjustly benefited from extreme poverty. After all, most of the individuals who have contributed to or unjustly benefited from extreme poverty may be thought as having a greater ability to alleviate extreme poverty (where they will be asked more) so the source of responsibility objection may be claimed to have become redundant.

I disagree. It is still important to mark the differences between individuals in terms of responsibility as those who have brought about less harm would be protected against overdemandingness. Parallely, those who have brought about more harm would not be allocating less to extreme poverty than they should be. Relatedly, it is utterly possible for a middle-income individual to have contributed to or unjustly benefited from extreme poverty more than a high-income individual. If we appeal to mere ability as the only source of responsibility, then we would demand more from that high-income individual and less from that middle-income individual, which is unjust.

Perhaps for practicalities of public presentation, effective altruists usually appeal to mere ability as the source of responsibility or they just draw attention to mere ability to show what ordinary individuals could achieve to alleviate extreme poverty. Even though this strategy to emphasise ability may be beneficial to attract new donors, it risks hiding different sources of responsibility, different levels of harm, and muddles the relationship between ability and responsibility. I am not arguing against deriving responsibility from

mere ability through the utility calculation, but overstressing mere ability as the only source of responsibility has its downsides.

It may also be objected that the *motivation* behind the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is to guide individuals to understand their moral obligations towards extreme poverty without being accusatory. One may add that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice just shows that individuals have an ability to alleviate extreme poverty and they can do so without sacrificing something morally significant: so the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not intend to hide the other sources responsibility, such as contributing to extreme poverty and being unjustly enriched by that. But we cannot rely on the motivation behind a moral principle to offset the moral problems it leads to. The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice fails to expose the different sources of responsibility and this problem has to be taken seriously by effective altruists.

## 2.6 The lack of rights objection

The lack of rights objection exposes another vulnerability of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. In a severe problem like extreme poverty, the rights of the extremely poor as subjects to whom individuals owe their resources are not mentioned.

What might the importance of using the terminology of rights be? Effective altruists often emphasise the importance of doing the most good, benefiting others as much as we can with our scarce resources, and improving lives. While the importance of these is evident especially in the case of extreme poverty, we might miss the importance of stressing the *agency* of the extremely poor if we do not use the terminology of rights. Without the terminology of rights,

the extremely poor could be conceived of as good receivers, beneficiaries, those who are helped, and the victims. With the terminology of rights, they are conceived of as rights-holders whose rights are violated, tarnished and unfulfilled by an unjust system: they are now moral agents rather than moral patients. The difference between these discourses may be regarded as merely semantic, but in fact, it is not: using the terminology of rights makes it apparent that the extremely poor are members of a set of people who are chronically deprived of their chance of having flourishing lives—the awareness of this connection is not only important for political mobilisation but also for understanding the social status quo in the right way. Any systemic deprivation would count as *violating their rights* rather than *failing to do good*, where the former has a much stronger connotation. Moreover, it may also affect the way we view potential solutions and which are preferable. When the extremely poor are patients, we have to work out the most effective way to help them. When they are viewed as rights-holders who can demand things of us, we should listen to their demands. Unfortunately, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not empower the extremely poor by recognising them as rights-holders, and effective altruists may be prone to regard morality as a one-way street where solely moral obligations are recognised.

*The Lack of Rights Objection.* The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice assigns individuals a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty but it does not recognise the extremely poor as rights-holders.

What rights may the extremely poor have? I distinguish two types of moral rights, namely, *absolute moral rights* and *relational moral rights*, which are both relevant for our context.

### 2.6.1 Absolute moral rights

Absolute moral rights are absolute in the sense that they are independent of the relations between individuals. In other words, they could be established without appealing to the relative inequalities across individuals.

In the case of extreme poverty, one example of absolute moral rights is subsistence rights.<sup>84</sup> For instance, Charles Jones argues that subsistence rights are human rights, which means that they are inherently valuable and immune to changes in time and location. For Jones, subsistence rights have to be considered as human rights because they "protect capabilities to achieve adequate functionings in the spheres of nutrition, shelter, and health".<sup>85</sup> Since subsistence will always be required for us to exist, and since protecting those capabilities are fundamentally important for us to have a minimally decent life, subsistence rights can be within absolute moral rights if we value human existence. Under this interpretation, we can claim that the extremely poor have an absolute moral right to subsistence.

Moreover, on the basis of three different assumptions, Stéphane Chauvier argues that there is a human right to non-poverty, which we could also take to be absolute. Chauvier's first

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<sup>84</sup> Charles Jones, "The Human Right to Subsistence," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2013): 61.

<sup>85</sup> Jones, 61..



assumption is the universal accessibility of non-poverty.<sup>86</sup> According to Chauvier, the existence of non-poverty proves the accessibility of non-poverty, although it does not necessitate the possibility that non-poverty can universally be reached. However, Chauvier claims that "[T]here seems to be no logical impossibility in the concept of a world where no inhabitant is poor".<sup>87</sup> Chauvier further claims that this shows that poverty is linked to empirical and economic problems, and since the poor are not predestined to poverty, the human right to non-poverty can be established. Chauvier's second assumption is that the poor are generally not responsible for their poverty, and in the majority of the cases, Chauvier believes that the poor have been subjected to poverty.<sup>88</sup> Since they have been subjected to poverty, they should have a right to non-poverty. Chauvier's third assumption is that poverty can be a negative external result of economic activities.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, there is a possible dilemma: arguably, all human activities produce both positive and negative effects, so why not we should not state that economic activity also alleviates poverty? Especially in the case of globalisation, the benefits of economic activity in alleviating poverty are hotly debated. Chauvier has a smart move here: "Neither global markets, through which the effects of individual decisions propagate, nor international economic organizations are designed to generate poverty. However (though this is perhaps more debatable),

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<sup>86</sup> I regard human rights as a form of moral rights.

<sup>87</sup> Stéphane Chauvier, "The Right to Basic Resources," in *Freedom From Poverty As A Human Right: Who Owes What To The Very Poor?*, ed. Thomas Pogge (New York: Oxford University, 2007), 303.

<sup>88</sup> Chauvier, 306.

<sup>89</sup> Chauvier, 307.

they are also not designed to alleviate or eradicate poverty".<sup>90</sup> Therefore, since global structures pertinent to economic activity are not created to alleviate or eradicate poverty, the poor involuntarily undergo the systemic effects of deprivation which calls for the recognition of their right to non-poverty. According to these assumptions, the right to non-poverty could be considered among the absolute moral rights of the extremely poor.

Both of these philosophers give us insights about the absolute moral rights of the extremely poor. Absolute moral rights are important because they are normatively substantive, expose the deontic considerations that we may have about the features of a desirable life, and expose the problematic aspects of extreme poverty.

## 2.6.2 Relational moral rights

Relational moral rights are relational in the sense that they arise from the relations between individuals. For instance, initially, I may have no absolute or relational moral right to take your £1,000. But once you damage my belongings, I have a relational moral right to be compensated for my loss. Likewise, I may have no absolute and relational moral right to live in your house. But once we sign a tenancy agreement, I gain a relational moral right to live in that house. In the case of extreme poverty, relational moral rights of the extremely poor emerge from (1) luck, and (2) chronic deprivation.

Consider luck. Numerous philosophers argue that wealth and welfare differences between individuals should depend on choices and not on coincidences. Some regard *luck* as a benchmark to

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<sup>90</sup> Chauvier, 309.

assess the advantages that some have compared to others and subsequently to evaluate the demands of justice.<sup>91</sup> Since luck favours some individuals over others by arbitrarily distributing wealth, some conclude that the coincidental circumstances interfering with the welfare of individuals ought to be compensated for. For instance, luck egalitarians advocate "counteracting the distributive effects of luck on people's lives".<sup>92</sup>

*Brute luck* is distinguished from *option luck*. Brute luck "is a matter of how risks fall out that are not in that sense deliberate gambles".<sup>93</sup> Conversely, option luck "is a matter of how deliberate and calculated gambles turn out—whether someone gains or loses through accepting an isolated risk he or she should have anticipated and might have declined".<sup>94</sup> Many luck egalitarians subscribe to the distinction between brute luck and option luck, and many of them find bad brute luck worthy of compensation.<sup>95</sup>

I do not intend to show how *luck egalitarianism* could help to establish relational moral rights. But, I think, *luck* itself can be a useful concept to understand who deserves or does not deserve what. There are many individuals who possess more wealth than the extremely poor just because of luck. They either have been born into rich societies and families or they have gained their wealth thanks to luck over their lifetime. They are also lucky enough to retain that

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<sup>91</sup> Larry Temkin, "Equality as Comparative Fairness," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (2017): 44-45.

<sup>92</sup> Carl Knight, "Luck egalitarianism," *Philosophy Compass* 8, no. 10 (2013): 924.

<sup>93</sup> Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 10, no. 4 (1981): 293.

<sup>94</sup> Dworkin, 293.

<sup>95</sup> Henceforth, whenever I use the term luck, I will refer to brute luck.

wealth as they do not encounter health issues, ecological disasters and wars. Their labour might amplify the wealth they already possess.

At a point in time,  $t_1$ , wealth is finite. Suppose that at  $t_1$ , two children are born: the first has been born in a high-income country to a wealthy family and the second has been born in a low-income country to a family who are in extreme poverty. The first has undeservingly grabbed a significant portion of the limited wealth at  $t_1$  and the other has been condemned to what is left of that limited wealth at  $t_1$ . The first child can use the wealth wisely over time by significantly increasing it through the skills gained thanks to a high-quality education, while the second child cannot, as the second child is going to suffer from preventable diseases, hardships and a poverty cycle. Obviously, the unequal distribution at  $t_1$  out of luck is very likely to create another, more radical unequal distribution at  $t_n$ , where  $t_n$  is any point in time after  $t_1$ .

This raises the *Problem of Desert* which is the base of the relational moral right from luck.

*The Problem of Desert.* Luck lacks morally justified reasons to favour some individuals by endowing them with some wealth and disfavour other individuals by withholding some wealth from them.

To elucidate on the problem of desert, some conception of desert has to be accepted. I use Gillian Brock's conception of desert, and take it as the basis for what individuals can deserve or not deserve: "A necessary condition of some people defensibly deserving certain goods is that others are adequately positioned to

deserve (and achieve) rewards too".<sup>96</sup> Brock also states that "[A] similar conclusion holds for entitlement, that is, a necessary condition of some people defensibly being entitled to certain goods is that others are adequately positioned to be similarly entitled as well".<sup>97</sup> Hence, all else being equal, an individual can be said to deserve a resource only if all individuals are adequately positioned to attain and retain all resources.

Since luck is by nature coincidental, it favours some individuals over others by arbitrarily distributing more wealth to them *without any morally justified reason* whatsoever. Accordingly, since not all of the individuals have begun their lives with the same chance to prosper, and since luck has unjustifiably influenced the course of their lives either positively or negatively, lucky individuals cannot claim to deserve *all* of their wealth. For instance, individuals who are born to middle-class families in rich societies, and who can use their income and savings flexibly, cannot be said to deserve all of their wealth. From the very beginning, they as lucky individuals have had an advantage over billions of people in the world in terms of wealth which has also increased their advantages with respect to health, education, security, self-fulfilment and social networks by which they have been given a substantially greater chance to prosper.

Nonetheless, one of the reasons why others who are unlucky individuals such as the extremely poor have not been provided with an equal chance to prosper is that they have lacked that wealth. Practically, it means that unlucky individuals are not adequately positioned to attain and retain the wealth with which lucky

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<sup>96</sup> Gillian Brock, Gillian Brock, "Global Poverty and Desert," *Politics* 26, no. 3 (2006): 174.

<sup>97</sup> Brock, 174.

individuals are endowed. Thereby, the problem of desert demonstrates that lucky individuals have unjustifiably attained some wealth where unlucky individuals have been unjustifiably withheld some wealth that lucky individuals are endowed with. We can call some of the wealth that lucky individuals possess as *undeserved wealth*. Lucky individuals attain and retain undeserved wealth *at the cost* of unlucky individuals such as the extremely poor. The unsettling consequence of the problem of desert is that retaining undeserved wealth is the moral equivalent of unjustified stealing: after all, retaining undeserved wealth is the result of lucky individuals arbitrarily possessing and gaining control over some wealth that has been undeserved by them. If lucky individuals who retain undeserved wealth fail to redistribute it, then they not only exploit the advantage of the power that luck endows them with but also prevent unlucky individuals such as the extremely poor from accessing wealth which could have been used to ameliorate their miserable conditions.

The presence of undeserved wealth is the basis of the moral right of the extremely poor to the redistribution of undeserved wealth. This is a relational right because it arises from the wealth asymmetry between different parties and it owes its existence to undeserved wealth. The extremely poor have a moral right to the redistribution of undeserved wealth where they would be entitled to receive some of the wealth of lucky individuals. We can introduce the *Luck Principle*.

*The Luck Principle.* Unlucky individuals have a moral right to some of the wealth of lucky individuals.

One might think that the Luck Principle is as demanding as the *Stronger* Principle of Sacrifice. It may be said that it forces us to redistribute our wealth up to the point of marginal utility, just like the Stronger Principle of Sacrifice. In fact, the Luck Principle does not necessarily require that. The difference is that the Luck Principle does not necessitate the redistribution of the portion of one's wealth which has been gained through one's own labour. Admittedly, this brings us to the difficult task of separating one's own labour from one's own luck. I concede that I do not have a definitive solution on this issue. But it seems plausible to me to say that people can be wealthy without owing *all* of their wealth *solely* to luck. In other words, they owe some portion of their wealth to some factors apart from luck, such as labour. If that is the case, then they are only obligated to redistribute the portion of their wealth owed to luck—they do not need to sacrifice everything up to the point of marginal utility if they have some wealth owed to labour. But the Stronger Principle of Sacrifice would require everything to be sacrificed up to the point of marginal utility, *even if* one has gained some portion of their wealth owed to labour. Even though the Luck Principle is not necessarily as demanding as the Stronger Principle of Sacrifice, it could still be regarded as a relatively demanding principle, especially if there are lucky individuals who owe almost all of their wealth to luck.

Another relational moral right of the extremely poor can arise from the moral right to necessity. For instance, Alejandra Mancilla claims that "[A] chronically deprived agent has a right to take, use and/or occupy the resources required to get out of his plight, even if this implies encroaching upon someone else's property or

territory".<sup>98</sup> Here, the moral right to necessity is framed by three conditions. Firstly, only the material resources which are required for subsistence or the means which are needed to obtain them can be claimed. The former can be food or space, and the latter can be money. Secondly, the exercise of the right of the poor should not interfere with other equally important moral interests such as security rights. Thirdly, other options to reach subsistence should be tried beforehand, such as "offering one's work and services, directly asking for help, and appealing to the relevant authorities".<sup>99</sup> Therefore, the exercise of the right to necessity should be the last resort.

Apart from these conditions concerning the moral right to necessity, Mancilla has two recommendations to potential claimants.

Firstly, to diminish the possibility of interference, potential claimants should act covertly instead of overtly:

Meanwhile, in cases where there is no alternative and the needy are faced with the resistance of others in the course of their acting, the use of force should be kept to the minimum, and take into account mitigating circumstances, such as the lack of relevant knowledge that the duty-bearers may have regarding the situation, the economic burden that the taking will represent for the owners of the targeted resources, the number of

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<sup>98</sup> Alejandra Mancilla, "What the Old Right of Necessity Can Do for the Contemporary Global Poor," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 34, no. 5 (2017): 610.

<sup>99</sup> Mancilla, 613.



times that the latter have already been targeted by other needy agents, etc.<sup>100</sup>

Secondly, potential claimants should target the individuals who will be least affected by the loss of their resources compared to other individuals, and they should take into account how many times individuals have been targeted by other claimants.

The moral right to necessity can be claimed to be absolute rather than relational, but in Mancilla's context, it is only available when these certain conditions are met so that it is always relational. These conditions implicitly suggest that there are some individuals who are relatively well-off, and the moral right of necessity are exercised upon them rather than other individuals who are deprived. In other words, deprived individuals such as the extremely poor cannot exercise their moral right to necessity upon other deprived individuals such as the other extremely poor. Again, there has to be a wealth asymmetry between individuals for the moral right of necessity to be exercised, which makes it relational. The importance of Mancilla's work is that it shows the presence of chronic deprivation coupled with the presence of richness can arise a relational moral right. We can introduce the *Chronic Deprivation Principle*.

*The Chronic Deprivation Principle.* The chronically deprived individuals have a moral right to some of the wealth of non-deprived individuals.

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<sup>100</sup> Mancilla, 613.

Both the Luck Principle and the Chronic Deprivation Principle demonstrate how we can give a shape to the relational moral right of the extremely poor to receive some of the wealth of individuals who are wealthy enough to live a comfortable life. The Chronic Deprivation Principle may be regarded as a less demanding principle than the Luck Principle because it is limited to necessity. Nonetheless, relational moral rights of the extremely poor arising from luck and chronic deprivation should strike us as strong.

## 2.7 What can effective altruists learn from these objections?

The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice has serious problems. It is overpermissive, it is insensitive to the sources of responsibility other than mere ability, and it assigns moral obligations without recognising moral rights. What can effective altruists learn from these?

Recall the permissiveness objection. It entails that not all morally significant things should be left outside the domain of sacrifice. In other words, deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits should be sacrificed to alleviate extreme poverty. The permissiveness objection is important because it asserts that the moral value of satisfying one's deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits cannot outweigh the moral value of alleviating extreme poverty. To avoid permitting deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits, I have introduced the Permissiveness Principle which can be followed alongside the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. The Permissiveness Principle limits the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice but is compatible with it.

Unfortunately, without being supplemented by the Permissiveness Principle, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice brings about an image problem for effective altruism. For instance, Amia Srinivasan is one of those who are concerned that effective altruism has a laid-back approach. Srinivasan's concerns are pretty much aligned with the concerns related to moral problems brought about by the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. Srinivasan writes that

Effective altruism takes up the spirit of Singer's argument but shields us from the full blast of its conclusion; moral indictment is transformed into an empowering investment opportunity. Instead of downgrading our lives to subsistence levels, we are encouraged to start with the traditional tithe of 10 per cent, then do a bit more each year. Thus effective altruism dodges one of the standard objections to utilitarianism: that it asks too much of us. But it isn't clear how the dodge is supposed to work. MacAskill tells us that effective altruists – like utilitarians – are committed to doing the most good possible, but he also tells us that it's OK to enjoy a 'cushy lifestyle', so long as you're donating a lot to charity.<sup>101</sup>

Srinivasan is concerned that effective altruism comforts individuals to the extent that they can have a "cushy lifestyle" if they donate enough to charities. Given that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice permits deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish

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<sup>101</sup> Amia Srinivasan, "Stop the Robot Apocalypse: the New Utilitarians," *London Review of Books* 37, no. 18 (2015): 8.

pursuits, effective altruism could understandably be perceived as a movement which would not find unnecessary and high-end spendings unproblematic. It could also understandably be perceived as an approach which does not aim to question and challenge more of the substantive issues concerning the wealth of individuals—for instance, the means by which the wealth of the individuals has been accumulated, how it is used overall, and to what extent individuals have a moral right to their wealth (even if they donate large sums of money). That being the case, effective altruism could be found to emancipate individuals from investigating the moral nature of their wealth while encouraging them to make low-cost sacrifices that are not morally significant. In that respect, some may claim that effective altruism deflects attention from those serious matters and buttresses the existing inequalities and injustices.

Nonetheless, we can respond that effective altruism does not need to have answers on those questions since a single moral approach cannot be reasonably anticipated to be overarching and answer each and every moral question concerning individual wealth. However, it is crucial to encourage effective altruists to seek answers on those serious matters concerning individual wealth, and to transform effective altruism in a way that it begins to require individuals to ponder over the cases in which they might have been overpermissive.

Regardless of these, we should not be uncharitable to the usefulness of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. Singer provides the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice in the hope of convincing people who may be disenchanted with the Stronger Principle of Sacrifice. The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice can especially be useful for those who are just starting their exploration of moral obligations and extreme

poverty because it is arguably a common-sense principle. Effective altruists can use the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice in a variety of ways, for instance, to promote effective altruism as an accessible way of living but it has to be stressed that it only assigns a minimal obligation. Simultaneously, the Permissiveness Principle can reasonably limit the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice.

Now, recall the source of responsibility objection. By only emphasising the mere ability of individuals to alleviate extreme poverty, effective altruism assigns individuals a responsibility to alleviate extreme poverty. But emphasising mere ability is never enough and this is the essence of the source of responsibility objection. It stresses the importance of emphasising the other sources of responsibility as well, such as whether individuals have contributed to extreme poverty or unjustly benefited from it. What would effective altruism gain by emphasising them?

By directing attention to the other sources of responsibility other than mere ability, effective altruists could distinguish parties which have relatively more and which have relatively less responsibility in addressing the plight of the extremely poor, even if they both have the same amount of wealth. If one has deepened extreme poverty, then it sounds implausible to require the same amount of donation from another individual who has not deepened extreme poverty. The former has a greater responsibility in the form of compensation, and if the former has also been unjustly enriched as it is in the case of the successful profit-seeker, then there is a requirement for restitution as well.

Effective altruists not paying attention to this nuance would not only not ask for the same amount of money from both but they would also not notice the differences between individuals with

respect to their moral standings. Put differently, recognising the source of responsibility would also help to avoid exaggerating one's moral standing, especially if they are blameworthy in deepening or unjustly benefiting from extreme poverty. Jennifer Rubenstein's warning against effective altruists who might be regarding themselves or individuals who donate as "heroic rescuers" is important here.<sup>102</sup> Effective altruists usually utilise the drowning child analogy to stress the responsibility of individuals to alleviate extreme poverty, where they are labelled as heroic rescuers.

This kind of high-drama emergency rescue scenario is powerfully motivating (which might be why Singer consistently invokes such scenarios in his work). However, it might also encourage aspiring Effective Altruists to think of themselves as rescuers, and the people they wish to assist as helpless victims more generally. This conception of 'self and other' can have several negative and distorting effects. It can make it harder for the self-described rescuer to notice the ways in which she has contributed to and/or benefited from the problems she seeks to address, and it can lead her to discount the insights of the 'victims.'<sup>103</sup>

Effective altruists regarding themselves as heroic rescuers not only implies that they are not cognisant of the problems they contribute to as Rubenstein suggests, but such a self-perception

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<sup>102</sup> Jennifer C. Rubenstein, "The Lessons of Effective Altruism," *Ethics & International Affairs* 30, no. 4 (2016): 520.

<sup>103</sup> Rubenstein, 520.

would also bring about a moral hierarchy between the rescuer and the victim. For some, perceiving oneself as a heroic rescuer may appear to reflect a psychological state without any negative social consequences, but an increasing number of effective altruists treating themselves as heroic rescuers may harm the effective altruism community as a whole. Over the long-run, this perception of effective altruism within and outside of the effective altruism community may immensely harm the movement. The merit of the source of responsibility objection and hence the Source of Responsibility Principle is that it takes the lid off the moral standings of individuals before they give too much credit to themselves.

Finally, recall the lack of rights objection. One may ask whether recognising the moral rights of the extremely poor add anything new to the discussion: are we just fetishising the concept of moral rights? I think there are serious benefits of recognising the moral rights of the extremely poor alongside the recognition of the moral obligation of individuals to alleviate extreme poverty.

The first benefit is that we go beyond effective altruism's standard discourse of "doing good" and "maximising good". For practical reasons, many effective altruists use these terms since they appeal to emotions which could encourage people to donate without making them feel guilty. Surely, donating to alleviate extreme poverty brings about good in the world but alleviating extreme poverty is now not merely perceived as something which is an opportunity to do good. Alleviating extreme poverty is now perceived as a way to fulfil the moral rights of the extremely poor, which would be a matter of social justice. This makes the case for alleviating extreme poverty stronger as it acts as a "second lock" alongside the moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty which we

can call the "first lock". Particularly in the case of the relational moral rights, provided that effective altruists recognise that some of their wealth is undeserved, it is very likely that they would not find the do-good framing of effective altruism sufficient. It is not that the do-good framing is inherently wrong, it is that it is insufficient to capture the moral realities of the current state of affairs. In that case, individuals may be inclined to donate even more because they would have the awareness that some of their wealth is undeserved.

Relatedly, as only appealing to ability as the source of the moral obligation of individuals without appealing to moral rights of the extremely poor is way weaker, doing so can also develop an unhealthy relationship between individuals and the extremely poor because we are not correctly pinpointing the base of obligations:

Mistaking the bases of our duties toward the distant needy is an invitation for the creation of new relationships of domination and subordination. If the global rich repay their moral debt to the global poor unconditionally, the rich retain no power to interfere with the affairs of the global poor and implicitly recognize the poor as social equals. However, if the rich impose conditions on repaying this debt (perhaps because they do not realize it is actually a debt), they may retain the power to withdraw the resources if they change their minds or they do not like the way the poor are managing these resources.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Theodore M. Lechterman, "The Effective Altruist's Political Problem," *Polity* 52, no. 1 (2020): 105.



Lechterman is right to argue that new relationships of domination and subordination may be born unless the moral debt is recognised. Only referring to mere ability as the source of the moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty and stressing the opportunity to do good give the sentiment that individuals might justifiably change their minds whenever they find appropriate. But the introduction of moral rights restricts those attempts and unearths the moral debt that individuals owe to the extremely poor.

Relatedly, the concept of moral rights honours and empowers the agency of the extremely poor. Some have been concerned by the shallow pond analogy, which has been widely used in effective altruism and is also linked to the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, because it has no recognition of the agency of the extremely poor:

In the shallow pond case, there is one agent. There are two persons, each worthy of moral consideration, but only one person capable of making choices and acting on those choices. The savior stands at the pond's edge, deciding whether or not to save the helpless child. The child awaits this savior, incapable of doing anything to respond to his or her unfortunate circumstances.

People who actually live with and struggle against poverty on a daily basis might reasonably be offended by being compared to drowning children. Poor people are rational actors who make a variety of decisions, many difficult, to attempt to survive and prosper despite the circumstances they face. Taking the

shallow pond case seriously, one could reasonably infer that the fate of poor people rests entirely on the moral choices of the wealthy, and poor people are entirely incapable of having any influence over their chances of surviving and flourishing.<sup>105</sup>

After making these points, Scott Wisor concludes that:

The uniformed might imagine that poor people simply consume everything they can get their hands on, just as a drowning child will grasp onto anything that will get him or her above the surface. But this view is mistaken, and treating poor people as such both fails to respect their agency and results in misguided policies.<sup>106</sup>

Thanks to the terminology of rights, the extremely poor are no longer mere objects of good receivers but they become subjects whose moral rights ought to be fulfilled. They may be victims, but they are not victims who are just waiting there as moral patients to receive help. They are subjects who are protected by rights and any contribution to their well-being would count as reversing the violation of their moral rights. This would also mark the importance of developing a collective consciousness for the extremely poor as now they would find themselves as not just some people in the world who are in misery but as members of a group who have been

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<sup>105</sup> Scott Wisor, "Against shallow ponds: an argument against Singer's approach to global poverty," *Journal of Global Ethics* 7, no. 1 (2011): 21.

<sup>106</sup> Wisor, 21.

systemically deprived of their wealth and welfare. This is also good news for those who are not among the extremely poor but who are the political allies of the extremely poor: by deploying the discourse that the extremely poor have moral rights, calling for political solidarity becomes relevant than ever.

One may suspect that an approach defending moral rights is incompatible with effective altruism. Surprisingly, effective altruists have emphasised the role of luck in one's moral obligation, although they have not taken it to its full conclusion that we can also derive moral rights from luck. Both Singer and MacAskill recognise the negative distributive effects of luck with respect to the moral obligation of individuals. Through stressing the undesirable inequality caused by luck, Singer makes a case for a moral obligation to assist which can be extended to a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty:

The argument for an obligation to assist can survive, with only minor modifications, even if we accept an individualistic theory of property rights. In any case, however, I do not think we should accept such a theory. It leaves too much to chance to be an acceptable ethical view. For instance, many of those whose forefathers happened to inhabit some sandy wastes around the Persian Gulf are now fabulously wealthy, because oil lay under those sands; whereas many of those whose forefathers settled on better land south of the Sahara live in extreme poverty, because of drought and bad harvests. Can this distribution be acceptable from an impartial point of view? If we

imagine ourselves about to begin life as a citizen of either Kuwait or Chad – but we do not know which – would we accept the principle that citizens of Kuwait are under no obligation to assist people living in Chad?<sup>107</sup>

In this example, the ancestors of citizens now living in Kuwait who "happened to inhabit" the Persian Gulf had luck which let them find oil. Thanks to an emerging additional luck as the time proceeds, some of them gained enormous wealth by selling oil. Inevitably, their children who inherited their ancestors' wealth also had luck which resulted in some of the Kuwait citizens to inherit large sums of money.

Singer uses the term "chance" in a negative connotation to rule out the permissibility of individualistic theory of property rights. By the individualistic theory of property rights, Singer refers to the assumption that property rights are so sacrosanct that they cannot be overturned or otherwise interfered with. Singer thinks that accepting the individualistic theory of property rights "leaves too much to chance" so that it cannot "be an acceptable ethical view". Once rejected, Singer moves on to argue against the suggestion that the distribution of wealth due to the coincidental circumstances such as the discovery of oil or climate conditions is fair. Applied globally, Singer does not regard the status quo of some individuals being rich and some individuals being poor due to luck decent. As Singer is a utilitarian, the reason behind finding such a distribution unfair may be that the principle of impartiality is violated. Singer's

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<sup>107</sup> Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 205.

concern over the violation of the principle of impartiality is harmonious with the Luck Principle because the Luck Principle is fundamentally concerned with treating all individuals equally.

Similarly, Singer states that

We truly are lucky to be Australians. The overriding reason each one of us is in little danger of slipping into extreme poverty is that we were born in, or able to migrate to, this country. Our abilities and our work ethic may help, but as the American billionaire Warren Buffett said, when told that it was his talent for picking stocks that had produced his wealth, 'If you stick me down in the middle of Bangladesh or Peru, you'll see how much this talent is going to produce in the wrong kind of soil.'<sup>108</sup>

And then Singer asks: "What is an ethical response to such good luck?"<sup>109</sup>

Here, Singer makes a point which goes further than merely recognising the negative distributive effects of luck. With quoting Buffett, Singer implies that some of the advantages of our behaviour patterns like the type of work ethic that we employ and stick to can even be offset by luck. In that case, luck does not only produce negative effects but it also neutralises or negates the positive effects that are cultivated by choice. By deeming it inappropriate, Singer's last sentence in the form of a question implies that the presence of

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<sup>108</sup> Peter Singer, *Ethics in the Real World* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2016), 289-290 (e-book).

<sup>109</sup> Singer, 290.

luck compels us to find an ethical response which we should act upon.

Likewise, MacAskill asserts in 2016 that "[I]f you're reading this book, then, like me, you're probably lucky enough to be earning \$16,000 (£10,500) per year or more, putting you in the richest 10% of the world's population. That's a remarkable situation to be in".<sup>110</sup> Parallely, MacAskill expresses the thought that "[T]hrough some outstanding stroke of luck, we have found ourselves as the inheritors of the most astonishing period of economic growth the world has ever seen, while a significant proportion of people stay as poor as they have ever been".<sup>111</sup> Although MacAskill does not indicate that we can draw a moral obligation from luck, MacAskill still acknowledges the significance of luck in increasing or decreasing the wealth of individuals.

Recognising the negative distributive effects of luck and drawing moral obligations from it does not contradict effective altruism. Given Singer's argument for a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty via underscoring the negative distributive effects of luck and MacAskill's emphasis on individuals benefiting from the legacy of luck, taking into account luck is compatible with effective altruism. Regardless of how philosophers of effective altruism ground their arguments for a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty, considering the moral implications of luck is likely to empower the reasoning behind effective altruism. Nevertheless, what is lacking in the discourses of philosophers of effective altruism is a discourse around moral rights. For instance, Singer does not recognise the moral right of Chadians as Singer only mentions the

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<sup>110</sup> MacAskill, *Doing Good Better*, 28.

<sup>111</sup> MacAskill, 30.

moral obligation of Kuwaitians to assist Chadians. Similarly, MacAskill does not use the expression of "moral right" with respect to extreme poverty.

Recognising the moral right of Chadians in Singer's example or the moral right of the extremely poor can buttress the moral commitments of effective altruism. In fact, it adds a further gravity to convince individuals that they have a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty *because* of the moral rights of the extremely poor. In that respect, they would decide to alleviate extreme poverty not only because they have an ability to do so but also because the extremely poor have to have access to the wealth that lucky individuals do not deserve. Therefore, recognising the moral rights of the extremely poor has the potential to strengthen effective altruism.

One may claim that emphasising the terms such as undeserved wealth and moral rights when asking for donations would cause effective altruism to become belligerent. One may simultaneously add that effective altruism would lose its non-aggressive character by adopting these. Surely, for some, the use of these terms may be controversial and overwhelming. But with careful strategies, these are powerful terms to convince individuals. Even the term moral obligation which is used by many effective altruists frequently appears to be belligerent because it signals that one is required to do something—nonetheless, effective altruists have been very successful in promoting what effective altruism asks by using the term of moral obligation through neat arguments without being hostile. Hence, the concern related to the circulation of terms like undeserved wealth and moral rights should be directed to the style rather than the content.

## 2.8 Conclusion

Chapter 2 has explained and evaluated the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice as one of the premises of effective altruism. Firstly, Chapter 2 has aimed to disaggregate several distinct interpretations of the principle, by showing several interpretations of the central but vague term "morally significant". It has then sought to single out a version of the principle which many effective altruists could accept as one of the premises of effective altruism. Discussing what could be meant by moral significance should be particularly important for effective altruists and their critics, because the interpretations of it drastically change how we view the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. Secondly, Chapter 2 has aimed to introduce three new objections to the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. All of these objections have evaluated different aspects of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice and effective altruism, and they are combined with the existing concerns about effective altruism. Thirdly, Chapter 2 has aimed to provide some new principles to supplement the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice without undermining it.

The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice represents the general demands of effective altruism. But it falls short in many aspects. The first shortcoming of it is that it justifies deliberately cultivated morally significant lavish pursuits, which is challenged by the permissiveness objection. The second shortcoming of it is that it is insensitive to the sources of responsibility other than mere ability to alleviate extreme poverty, which is attacked by the source of responsibility objection. The third shortcoming of it is that it explains moral obligations without implying any type of moral rights, which is found problematic by the lack of rights objection.



Nevertheless, we do not have a sufficient reason to abandon the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice has the potential to resonate with ordinary people. For those who are rightly uncomfortable about the problematic aspects of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, the Permissiveness Principle, the Source of Responsibility Principle, the Luck Principle, and the Chronic Deprivation Principle can be embraced alongside the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. Furthermore, individuals can use the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice to hold themselves accountable to *themselves*. After all, individuals need a clear moral principle on which they can base their actions, and the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is an easy-to-understand and an easy-to-accept principle. Nevertheless, provided that we have to evaluate a moral principle holistically, and since there are problematic aspects of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, it should not be the moral principle that effective altruists should *only* stick to. In fact, effective altruists should regard and promote the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice as a principle which assigns a *minimal* obligation rather than a *decisive* obligation. It should be minimal because the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is in dire of need of by being supplemented with other moral principles. In the face of global problems, ethics centred around justice, equality and solidarity demands that we have to carefully reflect on our decisions and principles, and rectify them whenever it is needed.

Since this chapter has demonstrated what effective altruism asks from individuals, we can now focus on the effectiveness part, as effective altruism requires us to do what it asks effectively.

## Chapter 3

# Effectiveness

### *Premise 3*

*Individuals ought to choose the effective option in preventing very bad things.*

#### 3.1 Introduction

Distinguishing it from other movements, one of the commitments of effective altruism is *effectiveness*. Effectiveness is of utmost significance for effective altruism, indeed even the name of the movement comes from it. In this chapter, I evaluate Premise 3, namely, the *Effectiveness Principle* to which effective altruism subscribes. The Effectiveness Principle states that individuals ought to choose the most effective option in preventing very bad things. This means that whenever we can prevent more than one very bad thing from happening, we are, so it claimed, morally obligated to prevent the worst of these things from happening with our limited resources at stake. As extreme poverty is one of the cause areas of effective altruism, the Effectiveness Principle also applies to extreme poverty.

Whenever I appeal to the Effectiveness Principle, I appeal to the standard position of effective altruism with respect to effectiveness: quality-adjusted life years (QALY) maximisation with a given unit of resource in the case of extreme poverty. Effective altruists almost universally endorse the Effectiveness Principle, understood in this way.

At the outset, I briefly show why Premise 2, or the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, is limited in scope with regards to effectiveness. After introducing the Effectiveness Principle, I justify Effectiveness Principle both through an outcome-based principle and an obligation-based principle in no-conflict cases. For the former, I follow the lines of Theron Pummer's *Avoid Gratuitous Worseness*, and for the latter, I formulate a new principle, namely, the *Better Fulfilment Principle*. Nevertheless, endorsing effectiveness in conflict cases is not as easy as no-conflict cases: I explore an objection from *fairness* which challenges the Effectiveness Principle. I show that whenever the Effectiveness Principle is universally endorsed in conflict cases, effective altruists become prone to unjustly favour the well-off, prefer tiny improvements in the lives of a large number of well-off over massive improvements in the lives of a small number of worst-off, and perpetuate the unequal luck distribution among the worst-off (especially when choosing charities). To overcome those challenges, I apply Martin Peterson's mixed view and Iwao Hirose's formal aggregation to effective altruism. I conclude that the Effectiveness Principle is for the most part a plausible principle in addressing extreme poverty but effective altruists should be aware of some of its morally repugnant conclusions before basing their moral judgements on it.

This chapter has four aims. The first aim is to show that Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not lead to effective altruism but leads only to altruism. This means that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice cannot be a substitute for a principle based on effectiveness. The second aim is to demonstrate that effectiveness can also be appealing to deontologists, as an obligation-based principle is formulated to justify effectiveness. Effectiveness is often thought to be tied to utilitarianism and other consequentialist theories, but it can also survive and thrive with deontic theories. The third aim is to extend the discussion of effectiveness and fairness to choosing charities to donate for extreme poverty alleviation. The question "Which charities should individuals donate to?" is a major question for effective altruists, whose answer is ever-evolving, and this chapter hopefully aims to make a contribution to that at a philosophical level. The fourth aim is to support a method of comparing effectiveness and fairness in rescue cases (Martin Peterson's mixed view and Iwao Hirose's formal aggregation, which are sensitive to group sizes) and apply them to the process of choosing charities.

## 3.2 Understanding effectiveness

Recall Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice: "If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it".<sup>112</sup> The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice asks individuals to prevent something very bad if it does not take on moral significance. It assigns a minimal obligation to individuals and

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<sup>112</sup> Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 231.

has been quite influential in explaining and promoting effective altruism.

However, while the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice implies *altruism*, it does not imply *effective* altruism. Consider the following:

A is very bad. There are two solutions to it, B and C.  
For a given unit of impact, B requires slightly fewer resources than C.

Which solution is the effective one? Surely, B is the effective one. Nevertheless, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not indicate which solution we should prefer over the other. If we do not sacrifice something morally significant, what we derive from the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice is that we ought to prevent A, and we are not required to do it in a particular way. In that case, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice permits us to choose C over B, even though we will unnecessarily lose resources. It also permits choosing B over C, which does not waste resources. It treats both scenarios as equals. This shows that the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not require effectiveness and is not sufficient to guide us in the cases where resources are scarce or we must choose some solutions instead of others.

In addition, while the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does not require us to sacrifice something morally significant, provided that we are *prepared* to sacrifice something morally significant to prevent very bad things, then it does not guide us to sacrifice non-morally significant things over morally significant things. For instance, if B is morally significant and C is not, if we are prepared to sacrifice B to prevent something very bad, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice would

not advise us to sacrifice either B or C. Imagine, for example, that I could sacrifice either my home or £5 to prevent something very bad from happening. The Weaker Principle of Sacrifice does *not* tell me to sacrifice the £5, even though this is the effective solution.

Also, consider the following:

1. A and B are equally very bad. With a given unit of resource, addressing A brings about a greater overall benefit than addressing B.
2. C and D are both very bad, but C is slightly worse. With a given unit of resource, addressing C brings about a greater overall benefit than addressing D.
3. E and F are both very bad, but E is far worse. With a given unit of resource, addressing E brings about a greater overall benefit than addressing F.

According to the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice, provided that we do not sacrifice something morally significant, we are required to address all of A, B, C, D, E, and F, since each reaches the threshold of being "very bad". However, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice fails to tell us what to prioritise in situations in which there are at least two very bad things. In that case, we are not barred from addressing B rather than A, D rather than C, and F rather than E. We are not required to commit to the problems whose solution will bring about a greater overall benefit. Consequently, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice alone does not reflect the most important and distinctive element of effective altruism although it has been central to the establishment and development of effective altruism.

A potential reply might be that B, D and F are things that are very bad, so if we instead prevent A, C and E, we sacrifice something of moral significance (preventing B, D and F). However, if "moral significance" is read in this way, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice demands nothing of us at all. We would not be required to do anything: since whatever we choose, we will not be preventing something very bad from happening, and so will be sacrificing something of moral significance, and if we sacrifice something of moral significance, then we are not required to do something. Such reading of moral significance is self-defeating, even for the purposes of the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice.

In order to turn Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice into one which supports effectiveness, and thus *effective* altruism, we have to add another principle, namely, the Effectiveness Principle:

*The Effectiveness Principle.* Individuals ought to choose the effective option in preventing very bad things.<sup>113</sup>

In the context of effective altruism, effectiveness signifies two things. Firstly, it means that the solution proposed to the problem is functional and thus, at least potentially, successfully addresses the problem. Secondly, it amounts to cost-effectiveness: a solution is cost-effective only if it brings about the greatest overall benefit with a given unit of resource when compared with different solutions. The Effectiveness Principle combines both of these aspects.

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<sup>113</sup> For simplicity, I use the term "the effective option", but in fact, it refers to the *most* effective option. I use these terms interchangeably.

There are two dimensions of effectiveness. The first dimension concerns with *what* is to be distributed. In the case of extreme poverty, effective altruists attach importance to QALYs as the units of distribution.<sup>114</sup> The second dimension concerns with *how* QALYS are to be distributed. Effective altruists could be sufficientarians, prioritarrians or QALY maximisers.<sup>115</sup> None of these approaches is incompatible with effective altruism in the case of extreme poverty. For instance, if you are a sufficientarian, *and* if you want to be as effective as possible as an effective altruist, you would want to lift the greatest number of people above a certain threshold with a given unit of resource. If you are a prioritarian, *and* if you want to be as effective as possible as an effective altruist, you would aim to improve or save the greatest number of lives of the extremely poor with a given unit of resource while giving priority to worse off people over better off people. If you are a QALY maximiser, *and* if you want to be as effective as possible as an effective altruist, then you would opt for saving the most QALYs of the extremely poor with a given unit of resource. I do not take a side regarding which of these approaches is better than which but it is notable that effective

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<sup>114</sup> Note that there is another metric called welfare-adjusted life years (WALY). WALY is a much more comprehensive metric since it includes every component of well-being as opposed to QALY which focuses on health. Effective altruists are trying to maximise QALY not because they *only* care about health. In contrast, they are interested in every component of welfare. But what often happens in extreme poverty alleviation through charities is that GiveWell recommended effective charities usually improve the health of the extremely poor so effective altruists emphasise QALY maximisation. Refer to Benjamin Todd, "We care about WALYs not QALYs," last modified November 13, 2015, <https://forum.effectivealtruism.org/posts/nevDBJuCPMCuaoMYT/we-care-about-walys-not-qalys>.

<sup>115</sup> To read a neat and brief account of what sufficientarianism and prioritarianism are, refer to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Egalitarianism", last modified April 24, 2013, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/egalitarianism>.



altruism is compatible with all of these whenever we think of addressing extreme poverty.

One may be curious about the approach which effective altruism employs in the case of extreme poverty. As I stated earlier, different effective altruists hold different normative claims, and they may differ on the approach that they subscribe to. Nonetheless, the leading figures of effective altruism and the donation campaigns currently stress the importance of QALY maximisation, and they usually cite the empirical data about how effective charities against extreme poverty have an advantage over ordinary charities concerning QALY maximisation.<sup>116</sup> There are many charities which are recommended by GiveWell and are thought to be effective when compared with ordinary charities.<sup>117</sup> GiveWell's methodology looks at many factors, all of which are concerned with welfare changes, where they try to maximise the welfare gain (or minimise the welfare loss). Following that, many effective altruists advocate donating to effective charities which bring about the greatest QALYs with a given unit of resource. In the following, I assume that effective altruism is primarily concerned with QALY maximisation when it comes to extreme poverty, and understands effectiveness in terms of QALY maximisation. I base my arguments on this assumption, and whenever I support or challenge the Effectiveness Principle, I refer to QALY maximisation. Moreover, I use the expressions "effectiveness" and "the Effectiveness Principle" interchangeably.

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<sup>116</sup> For a thorough discussion of QALYs, refer to MacAskill, *Doing Good Better*.

<sup>117</sup> Effective charities and the methodology of designating them will be carefully explained and discussed in Chapter 4. To assess the Effectiveness Principle, we do not need their names nor to know how they are compared with ordinary charities. Currently, it suffices to suppose that there are some charities which are better in improving or saving lives than others.

It is important to note that there are what I will call "no-conflict cases" and what I will call "conflict cases". No-conflict cases are cases in which we can either help A and B, or help only A. Whichever option we go for, A benefits from our decision. But B may not benefit from our decision if we choose to help only A. I call this a "no-conflict case" because at least one party always benefits from our decision, and our decision makes no difference to them. In contrast, "conflict cases" are cases in which we help either C or D. This is called a conflict case because different people's interests compete. Throughout the chapter, I focus on both no-conflict and conflict cases. Effectiveness seems uncontroversial when applied to no-conflict cases. However, when it comes to conflict cases it seems controversial. In §3.3, I use no-conflict cases to support an outcome-based and obligation-based principles of effectiveness.<sup>118</sup> In §3.4, I make clear that when it comes to conflict cases, the moral value of fairness comes in and tension arises between effectiveness and fairness. To address the tension between effectiveness and fairness, I endorse a method which grants some degree of moral value to effectiveness and some degree of moral value to fairness—and avoid the complications of always preferring effectiveness over fairness.

### 3.3 Justifying effectiveness

#### 3.3.1 Justifying effectiveness through an outcome-based principle

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<sup>118</sup> I use only one conflict case in this section, which is formulated for some other purpose than supporting the outcome-based and obligation-based principles.

As one of the effective altruists who embraces an outcome-based principle in justifying effectiveness, Theron Pummer introduces a principle to which individuals should commit:

*Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak).* It is wrong to perform an act that is *much worse* than another, if it is *no* costlier to you to perform the better act, and if all other things are equal.<sup>119</sup>

Being an outcome-based principle, Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak) requires individuals to choose the better outcome in cases in which one outcome is much worse than another, provided that the better outcome does not bring about an additional cost to individuals.<sup>120</sup> Given that Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak) does not require individuals to choose better outcomes at all costs, it escapes the demandingness objection.

Better outcomes could be achieved by *minimising harm* or *maximising good*. Arguably, Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak) is more appealing in minimising harm cases than maximising good cases. Consider a no-conflict case where we are to decide between providing medication to relieve the extreme suffering of one child (Poyraz) and providing medication to relieve the extreme suffering of a thousand children (including Poyraz). All else is equal and it is no costlier to us to perform the better act which is relieving the extreme

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<sup>119</sup> Theron Pummer, "Whether and Where to Give", 84.

<sup>120</sup> Pummer thinks that "[T]here are many cases in which there is optionality about whether to give without optionality about where to give" in Pummer, 87. Since I have already assumed that individuals are required to alleviate extreme poverty in Chapter 2, I remain uninterested in exploiting those cases where individuals are not required to donate, but they are required to donate to effective charities *once* they decide to donate.

suffering of a thousand children. Given the enormous degree of suffering we can prevent by performing the second act, performing it is much better than performing the first act. Symmetrically, performing the first act is much worse than performing the second act, even though performing the first act is not bad in and of itself. According to Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak), if we choose to relieve the extreme suffering of one child as opposed to relieving the extreme suffering of a thousand children, then we do wrong because we do not use our capacity to minimise harm despite the fact that it is no costlier to us. Such a conclusion is surely correct.

Turning our attention to providing benefits, rather than preventing harm, suppose that we are to choose between entertaining a child (Erdem) and entertaining a thousand children (including Erdem) in a theatre hall. This is again a no-conflict case. All else being equal, it is no costlier to us to perform the better act which is entertaining a thousand children. The amount of pleasant feelings that a thousand children could get out of being entertained clearly surpasses the amount of pleasant feelings that a single child could get out of being entertained. Entertaining one child is not bad in and of itself. But entertaining a thousand children against entertaining one child is much better and thus the latter is much worse. Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak) suggests that it is wrong to entertain one child if we could entertain a thousand children provided that it is no costlier to us. While there can be occasions where we grant the conclusion that not maximising good is wrong, asserting that it is *wrong* to entertain a child rather than an audience of thousand children is less appealing than asserting that it is *wrong* to provide medication to relieve the extreme suffering of one child rather than a thousand children. Presumably, for many, Avoid

Gratuitous Worseness (weak) has more force when applied to minimising harm cases in contrast to maximising good cases.<sup>121</sup>

Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak) could also be applied to extreme poverty because interventions are usually targeted to address harms to fundamental interests, and there are different degrees of effectiveness. Many would find addressing extreme poverty as a minimising harm case. Nonetheless, one may argue that unlike the cases presented above, in the case of extreme poverty, minimising harm often becomes maximising good over the long-term where the distinction between them gradually fades away. After all, addressing malnutrition, curing diseases, repairing slums and combatting with the lack of education not only eliminates or otherwise reduces existing suffering but also prevents future suffering while increasing the welfare of the extremely poor over time. Even if we do not buy this argument, we could still find Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak) applicable to extreme poverty with its full strength due to the existence of interventions resulting in harm reduction for the extremely poor.

Now, imagine the following:

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<sup>121</sup> By having two versions of Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak), one for harm minimisation and one for good maximisation, we may avoid the implication of Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak) that it is *wrong* to not maximise good. The one for harm minimisation can be the same as the current form of Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak). The one for good maximisation could state that "It is morally preferable to perform an act that is *much better* than another, if it is *no* costlier to you to perform the better act, and if all other things are equal". Solely in good maximisation cases, it would entail that performing the better act is morally preferable but not performing it is not wrong. In that respect, entertaining a thousand children rather than one child is morally preferable but entertaining a child rather than a thousand children is not wrong. We could also find cases where failing to maximise good is wrong but such a principle would at least recognise that not all cases of failing to maximise good are wrong.

*Malaria Vaccine.* Three researchers are independently working to invent a malaria vaccine to use in the regions where many of the extremely poor are living. After relevant tests, they finalise their research and decide to present their findings. It turns out that the first researcher has invented a malaria vaccine which provides one-year immunisation, the second researcher has invented a malaria vaccine which provides five-year immunisation, and the third researcher has invented a malaria vaccine which provides ten-year immunisation. They will choose a vaccine to distribute. All else is equal.

Which vaccine should they distribute? There would hardly be a discussion about this. The vaccine which provides ten-year immunisation against malaria is far better in improving and saving the lives of the extremely poor. Any position defending the distribution of the vaccines which respectively provide one-year immunisation and five-year immunisation is unreasonable given what is at stake. As the researchers decide to distribute the vaccine which provides ten-year immunisation, they choose the effective vaccine with respect to the impact on the welfare of the extremely poor.

Also, imagine the following:

*Malaria Charities.* With a given unit of resource, Charity A prevents one extremely poor person from contracting malaria, Charity B prevents two extremely poor from contracting malaria, Charity C prevents ten

extremely poor from contracting malaria, Charity D prevents a hundred extremely poor from contracting malaria, and Charity E prevents a thousand extremely poor from contracting malaria. The difference in the impact of charities lies in differences concerning the drugs used, personnel productivity, and overhead costs.

Suppose that this is a no-conflict case. Which charity should we donate to? Given the consequences, we should donate to Charity E. In both *Malaria Vaccines* and *Malaria Charities*, the nature of the decision that we are making is identical: we are deciding between improving more lives and improving fewer lives, and saving more lives and saving fewer lives. It is unreasonably arbitrary to choose anything other than Charity E to donate to, especially if we have initially thought that the vaccine which provides ten-year immunisation should be distributed. Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak) would also require us to do the same.

Similar to *Malaria Charities*, choosing a charity over another charity for extreme poverty alleviation is almost never costlier to us. We are donating to improve or save the lives of those who we do not know. Via reading bulletins, taking a look at photos and watching informative videos online, we interact with the regions we have never been to. In that respect, we can easily comply with what Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (weak) requires, that is, donating to effective charities for extreme poverty alleviation.

Nonetheless, one might point out the realistic possibility that donating to effective charities for extreme poverty alleviation could sometimes be *slightly* costlier to ourselves. Consider a conflict

case this time. Think of two rich business people who are emotionally connected to their native countries and want to address extreme poverty there. Rather than choosing the effective charities which target the extremely poor living in the other regions of the world, they instead want to donate to the ordinary charities which improve and save the lives of the extremely poor living in their native countries. With the donation that they are willing to make, they could provide 10 children in their native country with the necessary nutrition, while an effective charity could provide 100 children in another country with the necessary nutrition. There is a tenfold difference between charities. Choosing the effective charity over choosing the other charity would render the businesspeople mildly discontent. This draws our attention to *Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (still pretty weak)*:

*Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (still pretty weak)*. It is wrong to perform an act that is *much* worse than another, if it is *slightly* costlier to you to perform the better act, and if all other things are equal.<sup>122</sup>

In fact, the slight cost incurred by the businesspeople comes out of an intervention not being "value-effective".<sup>123</sup> According to Amy Berg, value-effectiveness means being ". . . effective at *promoting, securing, or maximising some value*. 'Value' is more broadly construed than 'impartial good': people value art, political power, and community, even when they are known to contribute

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<sup>122</sup> Pummer, 93.

<sup>123</sup> Amy Berg, "Effective Altruism: How Big Should the Tent Be?," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2018): 270.



very little to the impartial good".<sup>124</sup> Even though donating to effective charity is "overall-effective" (or, in my terms, effective), that is, being "effective at *promoting, securing, or maximising the impartial good*", it is not value-effective in this example because the businesspeople would not act on their values that they deem important if they donate to the effective charity.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, the moral value of the mild discontent that the businesspeople receive from donating to effective charity cannot trump the moral value of the tenfold advantage that the extremely poor would receive from the effective charity. Avoid Gratuitous Worseness (still pretty weak) is plausible in this example.<sup>126</sup>

In the context of extreme poverty, the outcome-based principle for effectiveness is simple, clear and plausible: we have the ability to improve and save the lives of the many against the few by donating to effective charities, and on the basis of that, we ought to choose the effective charities to donate to if we do not incur an additional cost or an additional unbearable cost.

### 3.3.2 Justifying effectiveness through an obligation-based principle

*The Careless Driver.* Causing near-fatal injuries, a careless driver who is on the phone hits a pedestrian.

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<sup>124</sup> Berg, 270.

<sup>125</sup> Berg, 269.

<sup>126</sup> Before this example, I have always used no-conflict cases. But this is a conflict case and I have not yet justified why we should help 100 extremely poor rather than 10 extremely poor. I will thoroughly discuss no-conflict cases in §3.4. For the sake of the argument, accept that it is right to donate to the charity which helps 100 extremely poor. The purpose of this particular example is to show the possibility of slight costs.

There is no fault of the pedestrian and the fault lies entirely with the careless driver. The pedestrian has to be taken to a hospital.

A relationship which was previously absent has now been formed between the careless driver and the pedestrian. The careless driver owes compensation to the pedestrian. Compensation can take different forms such as making sure that the pedestrian is treated and cared for, an apology, and the relevant legal charges.

The careless driver is about to call an ambulance and choose one of the available hospitals: Hospital A, Hospital B and Hospital C, all of which the careless driver is well-informed about. They are equally close to the scene of the accident. Having exceptionally clean facilities, top-notch technology and caring personnel, Hospital A is stellar. Hospital B is mediocre with its modest facilities and average technology. Awaiting to be demolished and reconstructed, Hospital C is fifty-years-old, crumbling and overcrowded, and its personnel is very impatient towards patients. As the treatment cost is equal in all of the three hospitals, the careless driver will pay the same price in any of the hospitals—it is no costlier to the careless driver to choose any of the hospitals over others. Which hospital should the driver choose to take the pedestrian to?

Acknowledging that the pedestrian will be better cared for in Hospital A, the careless driver would fulfil their obligation of compensation better than any other option by sending the pedestrian there. Since the fault lies entirely with the careless driver, and since the accident should not have happened in the first place, it is the obligation of the careless driver to make sure that the pedestrian is treated as soon as possible and as good as possible.

We can draw a principle from the conclusion, namely, the *Better Fulfilment Principle (weakest)*.

*The Better Fulfilment Principle (weakest)*. If one is assigned with an obligation, then one has to choose the option which best fulfils it, provided that it is *no* costlier to oneself.

The Better Fulfilment Principle (weakest) has three criteria. The first is to have been assigned with an obligation. The second is to have at least two comparable options to be weighed against each other through which the better option could be identified. The third is that the better option does not bring about an additional cost to oneself.

We can have two further versions of the Better Fulfilment Principle.

*The Better Fulfilment Principle (weak)*. If one is assigned with an obligation, then one has to choose the option which best fulfils it, even if it is *slightly* costlier to oneself.

*The Better Fulfilment Principle (moderate)*. If one is assigned with an obligation, then one has to choose the option which best fulfils it, even if it is *moderately* costlier to oneself.

In *The Careless Driver*, the Better Fulfilment Principle (weak) would still make sense. For instance, even if the careless driver had

had to spend an extra hour with the boring paperwork in Hospital A compared to Hospital B and Hospital C, the Better Fulfilment Principle (weak) would remain attractive. Nevertheless, I am agnostic about the Better Fulfilment Principle (moderate). Assume that the careless driver had had to spend all of their savings to get the pedestrian treated in Hospital A, and as a result of it, their children would have had to study in a considerably lower-quality high school. If that constitutes a moderate cost, then I would be inclined to accept that the careless driver could permissibly take the pedestrian to Hospital B which does not have that cost but yields a longer recovery time for the pedestrian, provided that the life of the pedestrian will be saved and there will be no permanent and unmanageable injuries. As another example, if the careless driver had had to suspend their leisure habit of travelling around Asia for the following two years, and if that brings about a moderate cost, then I would be inclined to assign the careless driver the obligation to get the pedestrian treated in Hospital A rather than Hospital B even though it is moderately costlier for the careless driver. As demonstrated by the latter example, the Better Fulfilment Principle (moderate) may not always be desirable. The harms brought about by a moderate cost may outweigh the harms brought about by not choosing the better option, where the obligation to choose the better option may be cancelled out. Likewise, the moral value of what is being lost due to a moderate cost may outweigh the moral value of choosing the better option, where the obligation to choose the better option may again be cancelled out. In that respect, given the variety and fluidity of moderate costs, one has to review the Better Fulfilment Principle (moderate) on a case-by-case basis.

The Better Fulfilment Principle is an obligation-based principle buttressing the Effectiveness Principle, whose scope also covers extreme poverty. In Chapter 2, I argued that some individuals' responsibility to address extreme poverty comes from the fact that they have deepened extreme poverty, they have unjustly benefited from extreme poverty, or their luckiness has led to others' unluckiness where the problem of desert emerges. In other words, they have a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty because they have to repair what they have caused. The Better Fulfilment Principle gains prominence here. With a given unit of resource, effective charities benefit a greater number of the extremely poor or they benefit a given number of extremely poor more. By choosing to donate to effective charities rather than donating to ordinary charities, individuals would fulfil their obligation better. Effectiveness is not only compatible with the Better Fulfilment Principle but it could also be an essential component of it in some cases like this. Note that while outcome-based principles like *Avoid Gratuitous Worseness* which underpin the Effectiveness Principle are unbounded, the Better Fulfilment Principle is bound by our moral obligations. Therefore, it should be especially attractive for non-consequentialists who doubt that we have a general obligation to do good, or do the most good.

Consider plutocrats who have been born into very rich families and live extravagant lives. The plutocrats soon inherit the wealth of their families and start to extract natural resources by making contracts with violent groups in South America. The natural resources which benefit the extremely poor are gradually depleted, the violent groups oppress the extremely poor, and the extremely poor become even more deprived. As a result, the plutocrats make

even more money. Although the plutocrats have a legal right to control their wealth, they should not be regarded as having a moral right to it. Given that they did not deserve their money in the first place and dramatically exacerbated the conditions of the extremely poor, they have a moral obligation to redistribute most of their wealth to alleviate extreme poverty. In doing so, by appealing to the Better Fulfilment Principle, we could say that they have a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty *effectively* where they have to find cost-effective solutions to address extreme poverty. By choosing the effective options, they have the chance to rectify more of their harms as opposed to other options: the Better Fulfilment Principle necessitates such a conclusion.

Now, leave the plutocrats example behind and focus on the idea that some individuals are assigned with an obligation to alleviate extreme poverty. As I stated in the previous section, it is rarely costlier for individuals to choose effective charities over ordinary charities. There may be cases in which it is slightly costlier to them, but the obligation still stands given the severity of extreme poverty. However, if there is a moderate cost, then we can discuss whether the Better Fulfilment Principle still stands concerning the extent and the nature of that moderate cost. I would be very sceptical of the idea that not donating to ordinary charities and instead donating to effective charities comes with a strong or extreme additional cost. It is safe to suppose that it is either no costlier or slightly costlier to choose effective charities over ordinary charities on most occasions, and the Better Fulfilment Principle is still relevant to fulfilling the obligation to alleviate extreme poverty.

Once we start to move from the weaker versions to the stronger versions of the Better Fulfilment Principle, the cost incurred naturally increases. Consider the following:

*The Better Fulfilment Principle (strong).* If one is assigned with an obligation, then one has to choose the better option in fulfilling it, even if it is *much* costlier to oneself.

*The Better Fulfilment Principle (extreme).* If one is assigned with an obligation, then one has to choose the better option in fulfilling it, even if it is *extremely* costlier to oneself.

The obligation-based nature of the Better Fulfilment Principle may seem to be tarnished because we increasingly feel the urge to compare the potential individual cost incurred with the potential benefit of fulfilling the obligation to alleviate extreme poverty. We may also need to take into account the inability of fulfilling obligations other than alleviating extreme poverty when the cost becomes high. Nevertheless, justifying effectiveness through an obligation-based principle such as the Better Fulfilment Principle is different from justifying effectiveness through an outcome-based principle such as Avoid Gratuitous Worseness in one vital way: the driving force to assign an obligation out of an obligation-based principle to someone is not about achieving unbounded impartial goodness. In justifying effectiveness through an obligation-based principle, we appeal to the pre-formed relationship between individuals as obligation-bearers and the relevant beneficiaries on

the basis of the values such as the moral importance of fairness, compensation and restitution, along with solidarity and empathy. Note that such a relationship has not been formed between parties in Avoid Gratuitous Worseness—it is *only* built upon utility analysis.

The importance of the Better Fulfilment Principle I formulated here is that it shows that effectiveness can be harmonious with deontological approaches. Contrary to the general view that effectiveness is exclusively tied to outcome-based theories like utilitarianism and consequentialism, effectiveness can be merged with deontological theories. However, one limitation of the Better Fulfilment Principle is that it is only applicable to individuals who already owe some of their wealth to others. If one does not owe their wealth to others, then the Best Fulfilment Principle does not apply to them. Nevertheless, there are many individuals who are living in rich societies who owe some of their wealth to the extremely poor so the obligation-based principle for effectiveness should be applicable to a meaningful number of individuals in the world. This particular limitation of the Better Fulfilment Principle also has its advantage: as mentioned before, the Better Fulfilment Principle escapes the idea that we must always limitlessly do the best thing, which many non-consequentialists would reject.

### 3.4 Effectiveness and fairness

As stated in §3.1, the Effectiveness Principle suggests that individuals ought to choose the effective option in preventing very bad things. Effective altruism owes its novelty largely to its adherence to the Effectiveness Principle. Nevertheless, when we accept the Effectiveness Principle, we confront an inevitable



question: should effective altruism *always* ask individuals to follow the Effectiveness Principle?

My response has two aspects, outlined and explored in §3.4.1 and §3.4.2, respectively.

In §3.4.1, I demonstrate that always subscribing to effectiveness can unjustly favour the well-off. By showing that *lifetime fairness of welfare* is violated, I argue that we should not always choose effectiveness over fairness. Moreover, always choosing effectiveness over fairness can buttress the *Unjustly Gained Advantages Multiplier* which morally permits benefiting those who have unjustly gained advantages if they are in a position to have better lives, even though their being in this position stems from their unjustly gained advantages. Furthermore, always choosing effectiveness over fairness may result in providing tiny benefits to a large number of well-off in contrast to providing massive benefits to a small number of worst-off.

In §3.4.2, I point to the tensions between effectiveness and fairness. I now focus on another type of fairness, namely, *selection fairness* which is giving equal chances of being helped.<sup>127</sup> By turning to the discussion related to numbers and the distribution of benefits and burdens, I show that the case for effectiveness may strengthen or weaken with population size. The same applies to fairness. I expose the potential conflicts between different moral commitments to which effective altruists should pay attention to before endorsing effectiveness at the cost of all other values.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Giving equal chances to be helped could include (1) giving equal chances to everyone where one of them or some of them will be saved, or (2) giving equal chances to everyone where one's life or the lives of some will be improved.

<sup>128</sup> I still follow the standard position of effective altruism that effectiveness is QALY maximisation.

### 3.4.1 Unjustly favouring the well-off

Effectiveness can sometimes unjustly favour the well-off, which is against *lifetime fairness of welfare*. Before explaining what lifetime fairness of welfare is, consider *Treatments* as an example.

*Treatments.* We have a finite amount of resources which will be spent on treating either Aspen or Blair. Having benefited from the immense privileges of the surrounding conditions since childhood, Aspen is quite a well-off person. Nevertheless, Aspen suffers from a non-lethal condition which drastically decreases mobility, creates shortness of breath and leads to severe tiredness. Having been born into extreme poverty, Blair suffers from the same condition. If we use our resources to treat Aspen, then Aspen will fully recover. Aspen's life will be full of happiness and fulfilment. Likewise, if we use our resources to treat Blair, then Blair will fully recover. Nevertheless, Blair's life will still be very difficult under the conditions of extreme poverty. Both of their lives have been and will be worth living. We have to choose one of them as we cannot use our scarce resources to treat both of them. As this is a non-lethal condition, the unchosen one will still live but will continue to suffer from this condition. All else is equal.

Aspen has benefited from the wonders of life much more than Blair as Aspen has had the chance of experiencing worldly pleasures, received adequate healthcare and proper education, and gained the other advantages with which life endows the well-off. Moreover, Aspen would be better cared for before and after the diagnosis as Aspen has a highly effective support network and does not need to worry about making ends meet. Assuming that Aspen will keep living as a well-off person and that Blair will remain extremely poor, thanks to the treatment, saving Aspen will produce more QALYs than saving Blair. Once we embrace the standard understanding of effectiveness that effective altruism adheres to, which is QALY maximisation, we notice that treating Aspen is more effective than Blair.

By pointing out that effective altruism is primarily interested in helping the worst-off including the extremely poor, one may resist the idea that it would find treating Aspen more effective than Blair. But effective altruism is primarily interested in helping them not because it is sufficientarian, prioritarian or egalitarian in spirit. It is because the wealth, health, and resources gaps between the worst-off and the well-off are so high that the same amount of resources usually bring about much more benefit to the former. There is no underlying moral commitment of effective altruism to benefit the worst-off *whenever* it can. Effective altruism is much more aligned with effectiveness, understood as maximising benefit. As William MacAskill makes clear: "As I and the Centre for Effective Altruism define it, effective altruism is the project of using evidence and reason to figure out how to benefit others as much as possible, and

taking action on that basis".<sup>129</sup> Revisiting some of the past definitions of effective altruism and finding this closest to the one commonly preferred, MacAskill concludes that effective altruism is "(i) the use of evidence and careful reasoning to work out how to maximize the good with a given unit of resources, tentatively understanding 'the good' in impartial welfarist terms, and (ii) the use of the findings from (i) to try to improve the world".<sup>130</sup> Indeed, there is no mention of benefiting the worst-off but benefiting people whomever they are as long as they are benefited as much as possible. The reason why effective altruists *currently* focus on extreme poverty is that curing preventable diseases affecting the worst-off is quite cheap compared to curing the diseases that are contracted by the well-off for the same amount of welfare gain in terms of QALYs. For instance, Ord highlights the empirical research done on different interventions against HIV/AIDS. By comparing surgical treatment for Kaposi's sarcoma, antiretroviral therapy, prevention of transmission during pregnancy, condom distribution, and the education for high-risk groups, Ord states that "In total, the best of these interventions is estimated to be 1,400 times as cost-effectiveness [sic] as the least good, or more than 1,400 times better than it would need to be to be funded in rich countries".<sup>131</sup> Then, Ord argues that

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<sup>129</sup> William MacAskill, "Effective Altruism: Introduction," *Essays in Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (2017): 2.

<sup>130</sup> William MacAskill, "The Definition of Effective Altruism," in *Effective Altruism: Philosophical Issues*, eds. Hilary Greaves and Theron Pummer (New York: Oxford University, 2019), 14.

<sup>131</sup> Toby Ord, "The Moral Imperative toward Cost-Effectiveness in Global Health," in *Priority-Setting in Health: Building institutions for smarter public spending* (Center for Global Development, 2012), [https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/1427016\\_file\\_moral\\_imperative\\_cost\\_effectiveness.pdf](https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/1427016_file_moral_imperative_cost_effectiveness.pdf).

People who decide how to spend health budgets hold the lives or livelihoods of many other people in their hands. They are literally making life-or-death decisions. Most decisions of this sort take dramatically insufficient account of cost-effectiveness. As a result, thousands or millions of people die who otherwise would have lived. The few are saved at the expense of the many.<sup>132</sup>

Ord's conclusion does not imply that we should benefit the worst-off because of fairness. It entails that we should benefit them because of utility.

An effective altruist who *always* prioritises effectiveness would subscribe to the idea that treating Aspen instead of Blair is justified. This should remind us of the "Benefit" approach regarding the usage of resources: "[P]articular individuals on one side stand to benefit from the resource so much more than those on the other side that it justifies their getting the resource".<sup>133</sup> However, such a position violates fairness as we are favouring a well-off person as opposed to a person who is among the worst-off. Moreover, taken to its extreme, if we know that addressing the problems of the well-off creates higher overall welfare gain, then always subscribing to effectiveness would permit us to benefit the well-off whenever it is the case so regardless of how severely we violated fairness.

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<sup>132</sup> Ord, 9.

<sup>133</sup> Andrew Stark, "Benefit versus Numbers versus Helping the Worst-off: An Alternative to the Prevalent Approach to the Just Distribution of Resources," *Utilitas* 20, no. 3 (2018): 356.

Here, the type of fairness that I am appealing to is based on the *lifetime view* formulated by Daniel Sharp and Joseph Millum.<sup>134</sup> The lifetime view has three assumptions. The first assumption is that people's whole lives as units of moral concern have primacy over the temporal parts of their lives. Sharp and Millum state that "If the proper locus of moral concern is indeed persons, rather than populations or life-stages within a person, then we ought to be concerned with the lives of individuals as a whole".<sup>135</sup> To support this assumption, they draw attention to the accumulation of disadvantages: those who have the greatest disadvantages are regarded as the worst-off, and we determine them by looking at their complete lives rather than life-stages since only looking at their specific life-stages may mislead us. The second assumption is that any advantage or disadvantage matters regardless of when it happens. Put differently, past advantages and past disadvantages equally morally matter as future advantages and future disadvantages, all else being equal. The third assumption is that a disadvantage at some point in the past can be compensated for by an advantage at some point in the future. For instance, "[S]omeone may take on additional shifts at an unpleasant job in order to save money for a more comfortable retirement".<sup>136</sup>

The lifetime view yields us what I call *lifetime fairness of welfare*. According to lifetime fairness of welfare, provided that none of the parties has deserved their positions, it is unfair to further benefit those who have experienced relatively high levels of lifetime

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<sup>134</sup> Daniel Sharp and Joseph Millum, "Prioritarianism for Global Health Investments: Identifying the Worst Off," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (2018): 112-132.

<sup>135</sup> Sharp and Millum, 115-116.

<sup>136</sup> Sharp and Millum, 116.

welfare over those who have experienced relatively low levels of lifetime welfare.<sup>137</sup> It is especially pressing in the cases of choosing whether to benefit the well-off or the worst-off. In our case, it is unfair to benefit Aspen because he has had strikingly higher lifetime welfare compared with Blair's lifetime welfare. If we are to treat Aspen and Blair with equal concern, then we have to help Blair. Such a conclusion entails that treating Aspen rather than Blair violates lifetime fairness of welfare.

Relatedly, choosing effectiveness in *Treatments* and treating Aspen result in discriminating against the worst-off just because they are less able to receive more welfare than they currently do. Practically, it means that we are putting an extra burden to those who have already been undeservingly burdened much more than others. The *non-linkage principle* encapsulates the worry that I am hinting at here. According to Kamm, "Linkage means that what happens to me at t1 affects what will happen at t2. It accounts for those who have, getting more and those who do not have, not

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<sup>137</sup> One weakness of this approach is that we may prefer benefiting to someone whose overall disadvantage is slightly greater than someone who has just recently started to suffer from some extreme disadvantage such as extreme pain. In that case, we would not take the presence of the extreme pain into account just because that person has had a slightly greater overall advantage in their lifetime. But, surely, the suffering experience of that person is unbearable. That is why Sharp and Millum has developed a revised account of the lifetime view: "According to this revised conception of the lifetime view, the value of providing a benefit to someone depends on both the level of disadvantage in her life overall *and* the degree to which she is disadvantaged at the time that she is benefited. The lower someone's overall advantage would be without intervention, the more important it is to increase her overall advantage. Likewise, the lower a person's advantage would be at a time, the more important it is to increase her advantage at that time." in Sharp and Millum, 116. A similar stance has been taken as to whether we should distribute even the trivial benefits to the worst-off at the expense of distributing great benefits to others in need: refer to Tyler M. John, Joseph Millum and David Wasserman, "How to Allocate Scarce Health Resources without Discriminating Against People with Disabilities," *Economics and Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (2017): 17.

getting".<sup>138</sup> Hence, if some undeserved bad thing happened to someone, we would not normally use this fact to put a further burden on them, provided that we follow the non-linkage principle. Brock reformulates the non-linkage principle as the following:

I would reformulate [the non-linkage] principle a bit more precisely as: we should not use a person's undeserved or unjustified disadvantages as the grounds or basis for choosing to impose a further disadvantage on them.<sup>139</sup>

Treating Aspen rather than Blair violates the non-linkage principle. Surely, Blair has not deserved the disadvantages, namely, the conditions of extreme poverty, which bring about the inability of receiving the same amount of welfare gain per unit of resources that Aspen would receive thanks to the treatment. Put differently, opting for effectiveness imposes a further disadvantage on Blair here: we would be unjustly discriminating against Blair and unjustly favouring Aspen just because Blair has been affected by negative consequences which impede Blair's potential to receive as much welfare as Aspen. Drifting further us away from fairness, this does not strike me as a moral inclination to embrace.

Moreover, favouring the well-off through only focusing on effectiveness may also entail being wilfully or unwilfully ignorant about how advantages have been brought about: perhaps some of

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<sup>138</sup> Frances Kamm, "Deciding Whom to Help, Health-Adjusted Life Years and Disabilities," in *Public Health, Ethics, and Equity*, eds. Sudhir Anand, Fabienne Peter, and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 240.

<sup>139</sup> Dan W. Brock, "Cost-effectiveness and Disability Discrimination," *Economics and Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (2009): 35.



the well-off have accumulated tremendous wealth through the exploitation of others, degradation of natural resources and tax evasion which can easily translate into a capability to have a better life. However, that capability to have a better life is unjustly gained out of morally impermissible actions. In that vein, opting for effectiveness alone may mean subscribing to the *Unjustly Gained Advantages Multiplier*.

*Unjustly Gained Advantages Multiplier.* We should prioritise allocating our resources to benefit those who have unjustly gained advantages if they are more capable to have better lives, even though their capability stems from their unjustly gained advantages.

This is an implausible principle. By allocating our resources so as to prioritise benefiting those who have unjustly gained advantages, we multiply their advantages. Even if we condemn the intentions behind and the processes of unjust gains, we justify the *consequences* of unjust gains as long as we opt for the Unjustly Gained Advantages Multiplier Principle. We must view ourselves as required to allocate our resources to rich and devil-may-care dictators, healthy but greedy polluters who sit on the executive committees of multinational corporations, and self-indulgent arms traffickers over allocating our resources to the worst-off. If effectiveness is the only concern, then favouring the well-off may be said to intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate the advantages that the well-off have gained unjustly in the first place.

By showing that some effective options owe their effectiveness to ineffective distributions of utility which stem from

ineffective distributions of wealth, it can be made clear that only caring about effectiveness is wrong. Now, think of Aspen as someone who has had the ability to alleviate extreme poverty but refused to do so to receive some infinitesimal pleasures (at the moment of experiencing them) which slowly but incrementally increased the quality of Aspen's life over the decades. Aspen has also gotten rich partly because of not donating, and if Aspen had consistently donated over the decades, Aspen would have not reached the same amount of overall welfare that Aspen now has. Aspen would have had lower welfare, though still sufficiently large to have a very high-quality life. The current distribution of wealth and utility where Aspen has not donated is ineffective because the alternative where Aspen had donated would have significantly improved the welfare of thousands of people, dramatically exceeding the total utility that Aspen has had gained so far. Permitting favouring Aspen in *Treatments* would signify that we could permissibly base our decision to choose the effective option (treating Aspen) on pre-existing ineffectiveness (Aspen's refusal to donate). Relatedly, this pre-existing ineffectiveness was caused by Aspen alone, and not by someone else or luck. If we think that treating Aspen is a plausible option because it is the *current* effective option, then it means that neither the existence of pre-existing ineffectiveness nor who was responsible in causing it and benefiting from it should inform our decision-making process. We are forced to make decisions on effectiveness due to the ineffective distribution.

For a considerable number of consequentialists, by refusing to donate and hence receiving accumulative infinitesimal pleasures, Aspen has violated the obligation to maximise utility. Failing to

maximise utility has led to an ineffective distribution of utility. Deciding to treat Aspen just because it is the current effective option means that we justify the consequences of a pre-existing ineffective distribution from which Aspen has greatly benefited. Some consequentialists may be tempted to call for a compensation of utility to fix the ineffective distribution that Aspen has caused, which may take the form of redistributing Aspen's wealth and, in our case, treating Blair instead of Aspen. In other words, some consequentialists may be tempted to opt for *lifetime effectiveness of utility* (instead of *lifetime fairness of welfare*) where future effectiveness of utility is partly or mostly denied to those who have failed to maximise utility and benefited from the ineffective distribution of welfare that they have caused in the past. In that case, we could choose the other option which is treating Blair because we would deny future effectiveness of utility to Aspen. That results in choosing the ineffective option in *Treatments* but it has a compensatory effect on pre-existing ineffectiveness of utility: not only those causing and benefiting from ineffective distributions are not collecting the rewards, but also the parties who were wronged and harmed as a result of ineffectiveness in the past are receiving their due share at last. In some cases, choosing to treat Blair may be more effective than choosing to treat Aspen, because effectiveness is now considered on a three-factor scale (past-present-future) rather than on a two-factor scale (present-future) where the pre-existing ineffectiveness is also considered alongside current and future effectiveness. Put simply, this idea denies that current and forward-looking QALYs are what only matters because it also takes into account the past distribution of QALYs, that is, backward-looking QALYs. If choosing to compensate for the pre-existing

ineffectiveness is not effective over the long-run, one may still find doing it, and thus satisfying lifetime effectiveness of utility, morally preferable over not doing it.<sup>140</sup> This train of thought still contains some deontic concerns but at least it is still based on effectiveness and utility.

*Treatments* is a case where we compare the interests of the well-off with the interests of the worst-off and there is an equal stake, that is, recovering from the same illness. But what if the numbers are not equal and there are unequal stakes?

### 3.4.2 Unequal stakes and unrestricted aggregation

This theme where there are unequal stakes has come up again and again in the literature, usually in the form of comparing the interests of people who do not have morally relevant differences. In this kind of case, the issue boils down to the plausibility of unrestricted aggregation where we are asked to ponder over whether tiny improvements in the lives of a large number of people could be justified at the cost of the massive improvements in the lives of a small number of people. Among those who find this implausible are non-aggregationists or anti-additive aggregationists. What particularly makes the aggregation problem interesting and important in the case of effective altruism and extreme poverty is that effectiveness coupled with unrestricted aggregation may allow the minor interests of the well-off to outweigh the basic or fundamental interests of the worst-off. If we could avert the loss of

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<sup>140</sup> Not complying with the lifetime effectiveness of utility may be permissible in some circumstances where the gap between the effective and the ineffective option is outstandingly high and there are other morally relevant factors to consider, but in *Treatments*, it is not the case.

more QALYs with the same amount of resource by donating to bring about tiny improvements in the lives of many well-off people, then why should we donate to significantly improve the lives of a small number of the worst-off? This would be even more controversial than defending distributing tiny improvements to a large number of people at the cost of distributing massive improvements to a small number of people where people do not have morally relevant differences, because this time effectiveness would disregard the morally relevant differences between the well-off and the worst-off and yet ask us to bring about tiny improvements in the lives of the well-off. If true, effective altruism could be severely damaged by this conclusion.

One objection which has already been considered in *Treatments* is that donating to improve the lives of the extremely poor is much more effective than donating to improving the lives of the well-off in the real world. But we can present a case where it is the opposite. Consider *Charity* and *Museum*.

*Charity.* We have a £10,000 to donate. We could donate our money to a charity which provides a basic income to 10 extremely poor people for a year, that is, £1,000 per person for a year. With this type of support, 10 extremely poor people will not starve and lead healthier, more secure lives. Moreover, they will be able to commute to other regions to find sustainable employment over the long-term. Donating to that charity will result in massive improvements in the lives of 10 extremely poor people.

*Museum.* We have a £10,000 to donate. We can donate it to an art museum which will replace its chairs with slightly more comfortable chairs. The museum has a budget deficit of £10,000—it has made every effort to raise resources, and collected a great amount of money through private donors and crowdsourcing, but exhausted all of its options. If we donate our money to the museum, the time spent in the museum by hundreds, thousands and even hundreds of thousands of people over the long-term will increase thanks to the slightly more comfortable chairs. As engaging with art increases welfare, a large number of well-off individuals will have tiny improvements in their lives. Moreover, people will also slightly be more comfortable when resting, thinking or examining the artworks. Its visitors will disproportionately be well-off and the extremely poor do not have any chance to visit the museum.

Donating to the charity will avert a great deal of QALY loss for 10 extremely poor people. For those 10 extremely poor people, receiving £1,000 per person means an opportunity to start a new life where they no longer suffer from the vicious cycle of deprivation. In contrast, donating to the museum will not save the worst-off from misery but it will bring about tiny improvements in the lives of many well-off individuals because of new chairs. Donating to the museum will also produce a very high amount of QALYs over the very long-term.

Surprisingly, given the many tiny improvements in the lives of many well-off, donating £10,000 to the museum could be much

more effective than donating it to the charity. After all, the sum of the tiny improvements in the lives of hundreds of thousands of well-off can exceed the sum of the massive improvements in the lives of the 10 extremely poor people. In other words, donating to the museum is more effective with respect to total utility in the world. Nonetheless, since the distribution per capita would be so tiny, the benefits to each person will be almost meaningless: well-off individuals will not experience a morally meaningful increase in their welfare, and those benefits would be in some sense wasted since we do not use our chance to bring about a morally meaningful increase by massively improving the lives of a small number of worst-off people.

Obviously, effectiveness fails to establish a moral difference between favouring the well-off and the worst-off, even in the cases of unequal stakes. Once again, effectiveness unjustly favours the well-off because it does not put additional weight to the interests of the worst-off. It violates lifetime fairness of welfare in *Museum*. Violating lifetime fairness of welfare in *Museum* is perhaps more serious than violating lifetime fairness of welfare in *Treatments*: choosing effectiveness in the latter means that we choose to provide tiny improvements to a large number of well-off who have not deserved their positions whereas choosing effectiveness in the former means that we choose to provide a massive improvement to one person, Aspen, who has not deserved the favourable position either. In other words, we benefit starkly more individuals in *Museum* as opposed to *Treatments* who have not deserved their positions. Moreover, donating to the museum may easily result in Unjustly Gained Advantages Multiplier because there will presumably be some well-off individuals visiting the museum who owe their wealth,

welfare and privileges to unjust advantages. Solely subscribing to effectiveness may make us insensitive to the moral difference between helping the well-off and helping the worst-off.

Additionally, as it is the case in *Museum*, solely subscribing to effectiveness may lead to finding unrestricted aggregation plausible. The dilemma is this: if one always subscribes to effectiveness, then one has to accept unrestricted aggregation, or if one rejects unrestricted aggregation, then one cannot always subscribe to effectiveness. This is especially apparent in the cases like *Museum*. But unrestricted aggregation, at least in *Museum*, is implausible because the improvements in the lives of the well-off are almost unnoticeable yet effectiveness requires improving the lives of the well-off. Hence, *Museum* shows that always subscribing to effectiveness not only opts for improving the lives of the well-off but it also neglects the importance of how benefits are distributed because it only considers the amount of *total* benefit.

As we understand that effectiveness may lead to unjustly favouring the well-off through unrestricted aggregation, it is discernible that effective altruism risks requiring us to improve the lives of the well-off if it *always* chooses effectiveness over fairness. As shown in *Treatments*, effective altruism would require us to treat Aspen rather than Blair if treating the former is more effective than treating the latter. In that case, Kamm's non-linkage principle and lifetime fairness of welfare are violated, and the Unjustly Gained Advantages Multiplier may arise. Furthermore, in *Charity* and *Museum*, effective altruism is also susceptible to providing tiny benefits to a large number of well-off as opposed to providing massive benefits to a small number of worst-off in which it again violates lifetime fairness of welfare, may trigger Unjustly Gained



Advantages Multiplier and fails to establish a moral difference between helping the well-off and helping the worst-off.

In response, one might pinpoint the charities recommended by GiveWell to which effective altruists donate. They are not charities which improve the welfare of the well-off. In contrast, they are among the charities which contribute to ameliorating the conditions of the worst-off including the extremely poor. But, perhaps one day, charities recommended by GiveWell will require much more resources than now due to unprecedented costs such as problems in transportation, climate crisis or wars—or, the treatment costs of the life-threatening diseases and the serious non-life-threatening diseases affecting the well-off will be much cheaper thanks to the technological advancements. Obviously, *current* effectiveness does not guarantee *future* effectiveness. Moreover, in the case that effective altruism chooses to improve the lives of *any* well-off person over improving the lives of worst-off once it is found to be much more effective, effective altruism may inevitably support the Unjustly Gained Advantages Multiplier Principle. This would render effective altruism even more unconvincing.

Today, effective altruism focuses on the interventions which drastically improve the conditions of the worst-off including the extremely poor *because* these are effective. Tomorrow, it is uncertain that effective altruism is going to support those interventions when they become relatively ineffective when compared with the interventions affecting the lives of the well-off, unless effective altruism values fairness independently of effectiveness to some extent. The extent to which it should appeal to fairness is an open question. But one thing is for sure: avoiding such repugnant conclusions requires effective altruism to appeal to fairness where

there should be a readiness to prioritise improving the lives of the extremely poor than the lives of the well-off *even if* doing so is relatively ineffective.

### 3.4.3 Perpetuating the unequal luck distribution across the worst-off

So far, I have considered a particular type of fairness, namely, the lifetime fairness of welfare. Apart from the lifetime fairness of welfare, there is another type of fairness, known as *selection fairness*.<sup>141</sup> Selection fairness is fulfilled when each individual is initially assigned the same chance to be helped.<sup>142</sup>

The moral value of effectiveness and the moral value of fairness could sometimes severely compete with each other. The former usually appeals to numbers where the concern is helping the greatest number or bringing about the greatest welfare gain. The latter usually appeals to deontic concerns like treating each person equally and showing due respect to people. It is important to show how effectiveness and fairness compete here, because it will inform our discussion about the plausibility of donating to effective charities rather than ordinary charities.

One of the main questions to consider is how we should treat numbers in choosing whom to help. The first position states that we

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<sup>141</sup> While selection fairness is usually the type of fairness that philosophers refer to when discussing numbers and fairness, Gerald Lang wisely distinguishes it from *outcome fairness*. Outcome fairness is fulfilled when the distributed outcomes are identical. For the sake of my argument, I do not discuss outcome fairness. Refer to Gerald Lang, "Fairness in Life and Death Cases," *Erkenntnis* 62, no. 3 (2005): 321-351.

<sup>142</sup> From now on, whenever I appeal to fairness, I appeal to selection fairness as opposed to the lifetime fairness of welfare.

should *always* directly help the greatest number. In other words, when there are groups of unequal sizes and we cannot help them all, we should target the largest group. This is the standard act-utilitarian position. For instance, Ben Bradley aims to show the strength of the first position by appealing to utilitarianism and contractualism.<sup>143</sup> This position is the standard position of effective altruism as effectiveness is normally tied to helping the greatest number with scarce resources if they are equally badly off.

The second position holds that we should *never* directly help the greatest number and instead assign equal chances to all parties in need of help. The second position has sub-positions. One sub-position is epitomised by the stance taken by John Taurek who argues that we have no grounds to save the greatest number and instead we should toss a coin as "it would seem to best express [our] equal concern and respect for each person".<sup>144</sup> Another sub-position makes a case for "the *individualist lottery*" where every claim is initially given equal weight but one's good luck can benefit the group that one is in.<sup>145</sup> Timmermann states that

To give the claims of A, B and C equal weight, a coin will not do. We need a wheel of fortune with three sectors, each of which bears the name of one islander. The person whose sector comes up is saved. If this person is A, both B and C perish. If B's sector is

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<sup>143</sup> Ben Bradley, "Saving People and Flipping Coins," *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2009): 1-13.

<sup>144</sup> John M. Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 6, no. 4 (1977): 303.

<sup>145</sup> Jens Timmermann, "The Individualist Lottery: How People Count, but Not Their Numbers," *Analysis* 64, no. 2 (2004): 110.

selected, B is saved. Having reached the island, the rescuer *then* incurs an obligation to save C. Similarly, if C wins B is also saved. We neither count, nor aggregate, nor quantify; nor do we arbitrarily assign roles to individual islander.<sup>146</sup>

This position is often combined with what Otsuka -one of the critics of it- calls the Principle of Nonaggregation where "one's duties to come to the aid of others are determined by the claims of individuals considered one by one rather than by any aggregation of the claims of individuals".<sup>147</sup>

The third position rejects both the first and the second positions. The third position has sub-positions as well. One sub-position defends the idea that a greater chance should be given to the larger group in proportion to their size.<sup>148</sup> This is the weighted lottery.<sup>149</sup> Another sub-position defends the idea that if the difference between the additional number of people who could be helped between the best and the second-best intervention is small relative to group sizes, we should give equal chances to the individual members of each group: if it does not meet this requirement, then we should choose effectiveness. This position is formulated by Martin Peterson (under the name the *mixed view*) and Iwao Hirose (under the name *formal aggregation*).

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<sup>146</sup> Timmermann, 110.

<sup>147</sup> Michael Otsuka, "Skepticism about Saving the Greater Number," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 32, no. 4 (2004): 415.

<sup>148</sup> Ben Saunders, "A Defence of Weighted Lotteries," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 12, no. 3 (2009): 279-290.

<sup>149</sup> Note that, *in the end*, this is the same with Timmermann's proposal but the initial motivation and hence the point of departure are different.

My method of comparing the moral value of effectiveness and fairness derives its roots from the *mixed view* and *formal aggregation*. These approaches to the number problem have not unfortunately been extensively studied and discussed. Their positions are very similar. Peterson writes that

The Mixed View assigns moral weight to two conflicting considerations, viz. fairness and the number of people saved. In this context, fairness can be conceived of as a moral value that supervenes on the distribution of resources, such as chances of being rescued, in a population. Hirose (2004) argues that an unfair distribution of chances is morally bad, and that this moral badness can be aggregated interpersonally.<sup>150</sup>

Peterson refers to a piece by Hirose where Hirose distinguishes the *moderate account of fairness* from the *strict account of fairness*. The moderate account of fairness "allows a trade-off between unfairness and other considerations" whereas the strict account of fairness rules out any policy which is unfair.<sup>151</sup> In other words, the strict account of unfairness entails that no amount of good could outweigh the badness of unfairness, and thus we should avoid unfairness at all costs. In contrast, the moderate account of unfairness leaves a room for assessing the relative moral significance of the goodness of a given amount of utility and the

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<sup>150</sup> Martin Peterson, "Some Versions of the Number Problem Have No Solution," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13, no. 4 (2010): 444.

<sup>151</sup> Iwao Hirose, "Aggregation and Numbers," *Utilitas* 16, no. 1 (2004): 75.

badness of a given amount of unfairness, whereby we could plausibly conclude that it is permissible to allow some unfairness to bring about some utility or it is permissible to allow some loss of utility to treat some people fairly. The moderate account of fairness could work in both ways.

Both Peterson and Hirose opt for the moderate account of fairness. The moderate account of fairness entails that there is no general obligation to save the members of the larger group. Nor it does entail a general obligation to give everyone an equal chance of being saved. As Hirose suggests, it is inherently flexible:

First, when we measure the overall bad of unfairness: If the number of the smaller group gets larger, it works in favour of tossing a coin. Second, when we measure the good of extra lives saved: If the difference between two groups gets larger, it works in favour of saving the greater number.<sup>152</sup>

As Hirose implies, if the number of people in the smaller group gets larger, it works in favour of tossing a coin because the amount of the badness of unfairness increases. Likewise, if the number of additional people between the groups gets larger, it works in favour of saving the greatest number because the amount of the goodness of utility increases. In order to decide which group to save, we should compare the goodness of utility with the badness of unfairness.

This conclusion can also be derived from Hirose's formal aggregation. Essentially, formal aggregation neither commits to a

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<sup>152</sup> Hirose, 78-79.

particular conception of good nor a specific method of "consolidating the morally relevant factors into an overall judgement".<sup>153</sup> Rather, formal aggregation provides us with a structure. It first asks which factors we deem morally relevant. Next, it asks to what degree we value them. Then, it asks us to compare them. To make it clear, Hirose gives two examples. The first example is the *Rescue Case*, where we could either save one person or five people. The second is the *Large-Scale Rescue Case*, where we could either save 1,000 people or 1,001 people.

. . .let us denote the unfairness done to each person by  $u$ . In the original Rescue Case, if we directly save five lives, this is unfair to one person: so the badness of unfairness is  $u$ . In the Large-Scale Rescue Case, if we directly save 1,001 lives, this is unfair to 1,000 people; so the overall badness of unfairness is  $u \times 1,000$ . Thus, an unfairness done to 1,000 people is greater than the same unfairness done to one person.

We are thus led to compare  $\langle 1,000 \text{ and a half lives saved} \rangle$  and  $\langle 1,001 \text{ lives saved} - u \times 1,000 \rangle$ . Is the goodness of half a life saved greater than the badness of the unfairness done to each of 1,000 people? We should toss a coin if  $u \times 1,000$  is greater than the goodness of half a life saved. Alternatively, we should save 1,001 lives if the goodness of half a life saved is greater than  $u \times 1,000$ . Formal aggregation can, and likely will, judge that the badness of the unfairness

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<sup>153</sup> Iwao Hirose, *Moral Aggregation* (New York: Oxford University, 2015), 220.

done to 1,000 people is greater than the goodness of half a life saved, and hence that it is right to toss a coin. At a minimum, formal aggregation can claim that it is right to toss a coin when the size of the two groups of individuals is sufficiently large and the relative difference in the size of the two groups is sufficiently small.<sup>154</sup>

Hence, formal aggregation overlaps with the mixed view. They are defending the same with the same reasons.

In the following, I pose a challenge for effective altruists who *always* subscribe to effectiveness by considering some cases where we are prepared to donate to charities. My aim is not only to show plausibility of the mixed view and formal aggregation but also support it with additional reasons and examples, and discuss it with respect to effective altruism. By introducing *First Case*, *Second Case* and *Fourth Case*, I show that the case for effectiveness and the case for fairness both come in degrees. Next, I show that the moral value of effectiveness and the moral value of fairness severely compete in *Third Case*. Note that in each case I discuss, I assume that we

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<sup>154</sup> Iwao Hirose, 199.



cannot or will not divide our resources, that is, we have to donate to one of the charities, but cannot or will not donate to both.<sup>155</sup>

Consider *First Case* and *Second Case*.

*First Case.* We have a finite amount of resources. We will donate our resources either to Charity A or Charity B which prevent starvation. Nonetheless, they operate in vastly distant regions from each other and thus they are targeting different extremely poor. With the resources we have, Charity A would prevent starvation of 100 extremely poor living in a region and Charity B would prevent starvation of 20 extremely poor in another region. All else is equal.

*Second Case.* We have a finite amount of resources. We will donate our resources either to Charity A or Charity B which prevent starvation. Nonetheless, they operate in vastly distant regions from each other and thus they are targeting different extremely poor. With the resources we have, Charity A would prevent starvation of 100 extremely poor living in a region and

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<sup>155</sup> This may happen in the cases where (1) both of the causes are too urgent that the loss of time between donating to two charities may result in not benefiting some people and wasting resources, (2) we have small resources, and they will become so small by splitting that our resources may not benefit either charities or both. Some people also prefer sticking to a charity rather than donating to multiple charities to form a consistent and sustainable bond with that charity and the cause it represents. Moreover, effective altruists tend to allocate all of their spare resources to effective charities rather than splitting their resources between effective and ordinary charities, because it is what effective altruism essentially asks. Therefore, I assume that we cannot or will not divide our resources.

Charity B would prevent starvation of 90 extremely poor in another region. All else is equal.

In both of the cases, effectiveness requires us to donate to Charity A rather than Charity B. But *always* donating to Charity A because of effectiveness leaves the extremely poor living in the region where Charity B operates unnoticed and they will not receive any resources whatsoever.

This raises the problem of *luck*. Since the founders of Charity A have decided to initiate their interventions in that region, studied and found the cost-effective methods to tackle starvation, and the operational costs have been lower for a myriad of reasons, the extremely poor living in the region where Charity A operates are luckier compared to the extremely poor living in the region where Charity B operates. Luck appears to have contributed to the *emergence* of effectiveness: the founders of Charity A might have chosen another region to set up their charity or natural or political conditions might have interfered with working in that region. While all parties suffer from the same condition and thus they are equally badly off, we are favouring a party over another just because the latter does not have an effective charity which could help them in that region. Relatedly, once we deny resources to the extremely poor living in the region where Charity B operates and donate our resources to the extremely poor living in the region where Charity A operates, we also violate the non-linkage principle. The absence of effective charities in the region where Charity B operates translates into the unluckiness of the extremely poor living there, and we are basing our denial on their unluckiness which they have not

deserved. Therefore, effectiveness appears to perpetuate the unequal luck distribution across the extremely poor.<sup>156</sup>

Moreover, in *First Case*, the difference between the number of extremely poor that Charity A and Charity B are capable of getting out of starvation (80) is larger than the difference between the number of extremely poor that Charity A and Charity B are capable of getting out of starvation in *Second Case* (10). The case for effectiveness in *First Case* is stronger than the case for effectiveness in *Second Case* since the additional number of people capable of being saved is noteworthy.<sup>157</sup> If the case for effectiveness in *First Case* is stronger than the case for effectiveness in *Second Case*, then we should think that the case for effectiveness comes in *degrees*.<sup>158</sup> We can still opt for effectiveness in both cases but the position that effectiveness comes in degrees implies that there may be other variables to consider which can offset our reasons to choose effectiveness, unless we are strict consequentialists who think that effectiveness (no matter what the strength of the case for effectiveness is) is always prior to any other variable.

Indubitably, flipping a coin to satisfy fairness would reduce the expected utility in both of the cases. In *First Case*, the expected utility of allocating our resources to Charity A in the case where do

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<sup>156</sup> As shown in Chapter 2, effective altruists like Singer and MacAskill are concerned with the unequal distribution of luck, and this motivates them to argue for donating, yet they appear to miss the importance of luck regarding *how* we should donate.

<sup>157</sup> It is not to say that we should opt for effectiveness in *Second Case*.

<sup>158</sup> Although relatively irrelevant to our case, a similar point is made where "The small differences in life years and their quality are insufficient to justify the very great difference in how the different patients are treated – some live and the others die." in Dan W. Brock, "Cost-effectiveness and Disability Discrimination," 35. The word *questionable* instead of *insufficient* may be more appropriate but the problem remains.

not toss a coin and thus choosing effectiveness is 100 EU whereas the expected utility of tossing a coin between Charity A and Charity B and thus choosing fairness is 60 EU.<sup>159</sup> In *Second Case*, it is 100 EU and 95EU, respectively.<sup>160</sup>

For the most part, in *First Case* and *Second Case*, effective altruists would have an inclination to donate to Charity A regardless of the concerns related to the violation of selection fairness. But that inclination might be reversed or at least weaken with *Third Case*.

*Third Case.* We have a finite amount of resources. We will donate our resources either to Charity A or Charity B which prevent starvation. Nonetheless, they operate in vastly distant regions from each other and thus they are targeting different extremely poor. With the resources we have, Charity A would prevent starvation of 1,000,000 extremely poor living in a region and Charity B would prevent starvation of 999,990 extremely poor in another region. All else is equal.

In *Second Case*, the difference between the number of extremely poor saved between donating to Charity A and Charity B is 10. In *Third Case*, it is also 10. However, the populations are strikingly different. For some, directly donating to Charity A rather than tossing a coin in *Second Case* may be easier than directly donating to Charity A rather than tossing a coin in *Third Case*. In other words, opting for effectiveness over fairness may be easier in *Second Case* as opposed to *Third Case*. Once we increase the

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<sup>159</sup> 100 EU:  $(100 \times 1/1)$ ; 60 EU:  $(100 \times 1/2) + (20 \times 1/2)$ .

<sup>160</sup> 100 EU:  $(100 \times 1/1)$ ; 95 EU:  $(100 \times 1/2) + (90 \times 1/2)$ .

population without increasing the additional number of people who could be helped between the best and the second-best interventions, choosing fairness becomes more and more attractive. Unless they are strict consequentialists, I doubt that effective altruists would have the intention of donating to Charity A in *Third Case* to the same degree as they have in *Second Case*. Possibly, satisfying selection fairness emerges to be at least slightly more important in *Third Case* than *Second Case*.

Moreover, even if we still opt for effectiveness in both *Second Case* and *Third Case*, we may still recognise that the moral value of fairness in *Third Case* is greater than the moral value of fairness in *Second Case*. That is, even if we believe that effectiveness always trumps choosing fairness, the degree of the moral value of fairness across different cases can be different. Rob Lawlor neatly explains the logic:

In the case where we can save one, or we can save two, the extra life we can save is weighed against the moral value of giving one person – the lone individual – some chance of survival. In the case where we can save 1,000,000 or we can save 1,000,001, however, the one extra life we can save is weighed against the moral value of giving a million people a chance of survival. This explains why many will have the intuition that we should toss a coin in one case, but not the other.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Rob Lawlor, "Taurek, Numbers and Probabilities," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 9, no. 2 (2006): 161.

In explaining why fairness gets more compelling, Lawlor compares the moral value of saving one against the moral value of giving a chance of survival to 1,000,000 people. In *Third Case*, it is the moral value of saving 10 people against giving a chance of survival to 999,990 people. This first explanation on why fairness becomes more and more attractive rests on comparing the moral value of saving a very few people against the moral value of giving a chance of survival to a very large number of people.

The second explanation may be that the difference in the utility remains constant when we move from *Second Case* to *Third Case*, but the number of people who are treated unfairly, whose claims are not counted at all, is larger. In *Second Case*, 90 people were treated unfairly (they have not been given a chance to survive) but in *Third Case* it is 999,990 people even though the additional number of saveable people in both is the same. Consequently, fairness as opposed to effectiveness becomes more appealing. Some effective altruists who are strict consequentialists may still be tempted to directly donate to Charity A in *Third Case*, following their usual path. But if we reiterate this case, and present *Third Case* over and over to them, then the number of unfairly treated people gets so high that the standard stance that they take may become questionable.

The third explanation of why the moral value of fairness becomes greater in *Third Case* compared to *Second Case* may be that the unluckiness of the unlucky group costs collectively more to them in *Third Case* than *Second Case* because 999,990 people will die without having equal chances to be saved in the former and 90 people will die without having equal chances to be saved in the latter. In other words, unluckiness which is an undeserved

disadvantage is dramatically more pressing and penetrating in *Third Case* compared to *Second Case*. If the unluckiness of the unlucky group in *Third Case* morally matters *more* than the unluckiness of the unlucky group in *Second Case*, then we can accept that the moral value of fairness comes in degrees as well.

These three explanations could make clear why both the mixed view and formal aggregation are plausible. When analysed with regards to effective altruism and extreme poverty, they provide additional reasons to keep wary of always committing to effectiveness at the expense of fairness.

Consider the last case, namely, *Fourth Case*.

*Fourth Case.* We have a finite amount of resources. We will donate our resources either to Charity A or Charity B which prevent starvation. Nonetheless, they operate in vastly distant regions from each other and thus they are targeting different extremely poor. With the resources we have, Charity A would prevent starvation of 1,000,000 extremely poor living in a region and Charity B would prevent starvation of 100,000 extremely poor in another region. All else is equal.

Here, we have a large population and a large difference between the number of the extremely poor to be saved. For effective altruists, not donating to Charity A would be unthinkable. The moral value of effectiveness seems to be greater than the moral value of fairness.

In a nutshell, here is what we have:

1. The moral value of effectiveness may be greater than the moral value of fairness, if
  - a. the group sizes are low, and the additional number of people who could be helped between the best and the second-best interventions is large relative to group sizes.  
(*First Case*)
  - b. the group sizes are low, and the additional number of people who could be helped between the best and the second-best interventions is small relative to group sizes.  
(*Second Case*)
  - c. the group sizes are high, and the additional number of people who could be helped between the best and the second-best interventions is large relative to group sizes.  
(*Fourth Case*)
2. The moral value of fairness may be greater than the moral value of effectiveness, if
  - a. the group sizes are high, and the additional number of people who could be helped between the best and the second-best interventions is small relative to group sizes.  
(*Third Case*)

These cases display the potential tendency of some to find the moral value of effectiveness greater than the moral value of fairness, or vice versa, when people are presented with different group sizes and stark differences between the number of people who could be helped.

These considerations may not be as relevant to low-income and middle-income effective altruists as high-income effective altruists because the likelihood of the former to affect large



populations is limited. But in the case where each low-income and middle-income effective altruist *individually* opting for effectiveness could *collectively* result in perpetuating the unequal luck distribution among large populations, the moral value of fairness could still be of importance even in individual decisions where resources are quite limited. Moreover, given that there are high-income effective altruists who have millions or billions, the moral value of fairness should be taken into account since an exclusive commitment to effectiveness might perpetuate the unequal luck distribution among the extremely poor. Furthermore, philosophers of effective altruism who are inclined to always appeal to effectiveness should be wary of the tensions between effectiveness and fairness.

### 3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have first shown that Singer's famous argument, first articulated in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", implies an obligation to prevent very bad things from happening, but does not guide us as to which bad things we should prevent. It does not require us to be effective and so does not imply effective altruism. We also need a principle of effectiveness.

This raises two distinct questions: Can effectiveness be justified? Should effective altruism always prefer effectiveness over fairness?

To the first question, I said yes: I supported an outcome-based principle, *Avoid Gratuitous Worseness*, and developed an obligation-based principle, the *Better Fulfilment Principle*.

To the second question, I said no: always preferring effectiveness over fairness could unjustly favour the well-off over the

worst-off, force us to commit ourselves to prefer tiny improvements in the lives of a large number of well-off over massive improvements in the lives of a small number of worst-off, and perpetuate the unequal luck distribution between the worst-off. Towards the end, in analysing the competition between effectiveness and fairness, I defended the idea that we should be cognisant of the group sizes and whether the additional people who could be helped is relatively large. We could justifiably choose effectiveness over fairness under certain conditions discussed, and that could perfectly fit into effective altruism. Nonetheless, effective altruists have to abandon the position that we should always prefer effectiveness over fairness, if they want to avoid the complications examined.

This chapter has aimed to show that effectiveness can be tied to deontological theories, alongside it being tied to consequentialist theories; that fairness imposes serious challenges to the usual preferences of effective altruists; and that we should question the universal commitment of effective altruism to effectiveness, especially in the cases of choosing charities. It has also provided a method to overcome those challenges by applying the mixed view and formal aggregation.

In the next chapter, I will assess whether donating to effective charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Systemic Change Objection: Low-Risk Actions versus High-Risk Actions**

#### *Premise 4*

*Donating to effective charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty.*

#### **4.1 Introduction**

One of the distinctive features of effective altruism, alongside its emphasis on donating to charity, is its insistence on finding a methodology to find the right charities to donate to. To that end, effective altruists argue that fulfilling the moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty requires us to carefully consider the consequences of donating by assessing and comparing the impact of charities. As they believe that alleviating extreme poverty is possible through donating, they rigorously promote donating to what they deem to be

*effective* charities. They submit that donating to effective charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty. This is Premise 4.

Premise 4 is challenged by the *systemic change objection*. The systemic change objection holds that effective altruism unjustifiably distracts individuals from allocating their spare resources to systemic change. According to the proponents of the systemic change objection, effective altruism and philanthropic causes in general prevent us from focusing on more serious aspects of extreme poverty, that is, the systemic causes of extreme poverty.

This chapter has several parts.

In §4.2, I show how effective charities are identified by GiveWell -a meta-charity whose evaluations are taken very seriously by effective altruists- and discuss some of its limitations regarding its moral commitments.

In §4.3, I present some empirical findings to understand the distinction between systemic causes of extreme poverty (such as illicit financial flows, foreign debt, war and military spending, inheritance laws, colonialism) and symptoms of extreme poverty (such as malaria and neglected tropical diseases). This distinction is quite important because the proponents of the systemic change objection often appeal to this distinction, and understanding the relative importance of the systemic causes of extreme poverty weighed against the symptoms of extreme poverty can only be determined by engaging with some empirical research. By presenting the empirical findings, I demonstrate that systemic causes of extreme poverty are indeed more serious than its symptoms. The word "serious" is used in two different senses. The first is that the systemic causes of extreme poverty are more serious than its symptoms because they have brought about much more

harm than the symptoms and hence successfully tackling the systemic causes would save much more resources to combat the effects of extreme poverty. The second is that the systemic causes of extreme poverty are more serious than its symptoms because addressing the systemic causes paves the way for addressing the symptoms, or, in other words, it significantly increases the chances of eliminating the symptoms.<sup>162</sup>

In §4.4, I start analysing the gist of the systemic change objection by identifying and explaining three possible propositions that we can draw from the systemic change objection, which vary in the commitment to addressing systemic change that they demand. The first proposition is that individuals should allocate *all* of their spare resources to systemic change. The second proposition is that individuals should allocate *most* of their spare resources to systemic change. The third proposition is that individuals should allocate *some* of their spare resources to systemic change. I evaluate these three propositions with respect to low-risk actions versus high-risk actions in §4.5.

I conclude that we have sufficient reasons to submit that donating to the most effective charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty, but I suggest that we should not allocate all of our spare resources either to effective charities or to systemic change. Instead, we should divide our resources between effective charities and systemic change. In that regard, while it carries some weight, the systemic change objection does not have the power to undermine the very foundations of effective altruism.

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<sup>162</sup> Note that symptoms *can* also deepen extreme poverty, but they are called "symptoms" because they are mostly the result of neglecting systemic causes of extreme poverty and the systemic causes of extreme poverty are much more responsible in creating extreme poverty than symptoms.

There are three points to make here. Firstly, normally, the systemic change objection is discussed in relation to whether individuals have obligations towards improving institutions. Among those who argue that we have obligations towards improving institutions, there is little or no attempt made to scrutinise *what portion* of our spare resources we should allocate to systemic change. That is why I delineate and clarify three different propositions we can draw from the systemic change objection, and assess the systemic change objection accordingly.

Secondly, unfortunately, most of the philosophical discussion regarding how to weigh the importance of systemic causes and symptoms of extreme poverty against each other is done without relying on proper empirical research. By separating the systemic causes and the symptoms of extreme poverty and by relying on empirical research, I make a solid distinction between systemic causes and symptoms.

Thirdly, most of the literature focuses on the weight of obligations towards reforming global institutions to tackle extreme poverty, but pays little attention to the comparison between low-risk and high-risk actions when it comes to *individual* donors. I open a debate on risk specifically on this issue.

## 4.2 The criteria for designating effective charities

Effective altruists single out what they call effective charities. In a nutshell, according to effective altruists, effective charities are the charities which deal with (1) important problems, which are great in size, (2) neglected problems, which are underfunded, and (3) tractable problems, which have a high probability of being solved.

Note that problems which are great in size, comparatively neglected and tractable are likely to bring about a lot of good when addressed, and for the most part, much more than the problems which are smaller in size, comparatively unneglected, and intractable. In deciding what to do against a counterfactual baseline where everyone else acts as they ordinarily would (business-as-usual), singling out effective charities seem to be very important because we have the ability to multiply the amount of utility created.

Firstly, all else being equal, effective charities deal with important problems which are great in size. The term size refers both to the number of people affected and how seriously they are affected by a given problem. Charities working towards alleviating extreme poverty pass this criterion easily as extreme poverty brings about extensive misery for hundreds of millions of people. Nonetheless, when charities dealing with important problems are compared, they need not only be effective but also cost-effective. While effectiveness refers to implementing the right policies so that charities can make a positive impact, cost-effectiveness requires comparing the positive impact brought about with respect to finite resources. In other words, effective charities not only bring about positive impact but also result in greater improvements *per unit of resource* compared to other charities. The positive impact is often understood in QALY terms.<sup>163</sup>

Referring to research on school attendance, MacAskill supports donating to deworming charities rather than charities transferring cash to girls, merit scholarships or free uniforms because deworming results in additional 139 years of schooling per \$1,000 compared to 0.2, 2.7 and 7.1 additional years,

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<sup>163</sup> This is the broad approach of effective altruism as discussed in Chapter 3.

respectively.<sup>164</sup> In the case of assessing the cost-effectiveness of charities pertinent to health, MacAskill thinks that the metric of QALY is a plausible guide to understand how the activities of charities affect the extremely poor.<sup>165</sup> All else being equal, greater QALYs per unit of money means greater cost-effectiveness.

Secondly, effective charities are more likely to be found in neglected areas. Effective altruists point out the funding gaps, the plugging of which could do a lot of good. Nevertheless, funding gaps have to be assessed with regards to marginal utility. MacAskill gives an example of the 2010 Haiti earthquake and the 2011 Japan earthquake where similar disastrous consequences happened, such as thousands of deaths, an outbreak of diseases, and the lack of electricity and water.<sup>166</sup> However, there were significant differences. Haiti had around 150,000 deaths, and Japan had around 15,000 deaths. Haiti was one of the poorest countries in the world whereas Japan was the fourth-richest country with the capacity and resources to address the earthquake on its own. Japan is 1,000 times richer than Haiti.<sup>167</sup> Although the international aid to each of the earthquakes came to about \$5 billion, MacAskill criticises the way in which the world was biased towards Japan as "funding seems to be allocated in proportion with how evocative and widely publicised the disaster is, rather than on the basis of its scale and diversity".<sup>168</sup> Despite the huge differences, the amount of money

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<sup>164</sup> William MacAskill, *Doing Good Better*, 59-61.

<sup>165</sup> MacAskill, 44-45.

<sup>166</sup> MacAskill, 69.

<sup>167</sup> MacAskill, 69-70.

<sup>168</sup> MacAskill, 70.



poured into Haiti and Japan was almost the same. Causes which are already well-funded, or where someone else would likely fund them if we did not, are unlikely to be effective causes because of diminishing marginal returns and replaceability: in this case, funding Japan would be the relatively ineffective choice.

For an individual considering where to donate, if others are already donating to Japan, and if it is predictable that others will donate to Japan, funding Haiti would still save more lives because it would bring about more QALYs. But since the amount of money poured into Haiti and Japan was almost the same, despite the differences in the scales of the disasters, Haiti was neglected. All else being equal, charities which supported Haiti tackled a more neglected problem. Dollar for dollar, donations to such charities had a higher marginal utility than supporting Japan. Therefore, it is significant for effective altruists that only the charities working on highly neglected problems in which a lot of marginal utility could be realised should be identified as effective.

Thirdly, effective charities have to work on tractable causes. MacAskill gives the example of ageing:

[A]lmost two-thirds of global ill health is a result of aging. It's a problem that's highly neglected: there are only a tiny number of research institutes focused on trying to prevent the causes of aging (rather than to treat its symptoms, like cancer, stroke, Alzheimer's, and so on). However, the reason it's neglected is that many scientists believe it to be highly intractable.

Preventing the aging process is just a very difficult problem to solve.<sup>169</sup>

Therefore, given the low degree of tractability of ageing at the moment, charities which address ageing are not regarded as effective. However, MacAskill adds that ". . . it's important not just to look at our current best-guess estimates but to make estimates about the long-run tractability of the cause as well".<sup>170</sup> One day if ageing becomes as tractable as other causes which are highly tractable, then it may become suitable to be recognised as a promising cause. The assessment of tractability means that effective charities cope with highly tractable causes which would yield a great amount of good when solved.

Many people are inclined to include administrative costs to the criteria in assessing where to donate. MacAskill does not think that it is wise to do so: MacAskill states that administration costs alone do not mean anything. In that regard, MacAskill compares the charities Books for Africa, Development Media International, and GiveDirectly. MacAskill states that

Books For Africa ships one book with every fifty cents donated to them. GiveDirectly gives the poor ninety cents with every dollar donated to them. Development Media International spends \$1.5 million to run a mass media campaign promoting health education in a particular country. But those numbers alone don't tell us that much. Is it better to ship three million

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<sup>169</sup> MacAskill, 228.

<sup>170</sup> MacAskill, 228.

schoolbooks, transfer \$1.35 million to poor people, or educate a country's populace about how they can stay healthy (each of which would cost \$1.5 million)? To answer that, we have to know how these different expenditures affect people's lives.<sup>171</sup>

According to MacAskill, Books for Africa has low administration costs.<sup>172</sup> But, according to MacAskill, there is no high-quality evidence regarding the impact that it has on the lives of people.<sup>173</sup> MacAskill discourages us from donating to Books for Africa. Then, MacAskill compares Development Media International and GiveDirectly with regards to cost-effectiveness in terms of QALYs, the robustness of evidence regarding their impacts, the quality of implementations, and the funding gaps: the winner is GiveDirectly.<sup>174</sup> In other words, MacAskill combines the criteria of size, neglectedness, and tractability in finding GiveDirectly better than others. As evident from MacAskill's evaluation, it is not the administration costs but the impact of that charities that matters.

As MacAskill points out in 2016, earning at least \$16,000 (£10,500) per year puts individuals in the richest 10% of the global population, and those individuals can anticipate doing "*at least* one hundred times as much to benefit other people as [they] can to

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<sup>171</sup> MacAskill, 228.

<sup>172</sup> MacAskill, 128.

<sup>173</sup> MacAskill, 132.

<sup>174</sup> MacAskill, 147.

benefit [themselves]".<sup>175</sup> This is what he calls the *100x Multiplier*.<sup>176</sup> To prove the 100x Multiplier, MacAskill makes a comparison between medical treatments in rich societies and treatments in poor societies. MacAskill states that public health experts regard 1 QALY for less than \$50,000 "as a good value, and health programs will often be funded even if the cost per QALY is much higher than \$50,000" in the United States of America.<sup>177</sup> Nevertheless, the same benefit, that is, saving 1 QALY can be done by spending "as little as \$100" in poor societies, for instance, on malaria prevention.<sup>178</sup> Therefore, by spending \$100 on the treatment of a disease from which the extremely poor severely suffer, individuals can produce 500 times more benefit compared to spending the same amount of money on a treatment for a disease prevalent in a rich society. MacAskill makes this comparison not only to remind individuals who pass the annual threshold of \$16,000 that they have the 100x Multiplier but also to show that donating to effective charities could have a tremendous effect on the lives of the extremely poor.

Who evaluates the degree of the cost-effectiveness of charities, ranks them, and identifies some charities as effective? Currently, effective altruists tend to deem the charities recommended by GiveWell effective. Founded as a non-profit charity assessment organisation in 2007 by two friends who worked at a hedge fund, GiveWell assesses the cost-effectiveness of charities instead of focusing on the traditional metrics such as administrative expense percentage, program expenses growth, and working capital

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<sup>175</sup> MacAskill, 47.

<sup>176</sup> MacAskill, 47.

<sup>177</sup> MacAskill, 74.

<sup>178</sup> MacAskill, 74.

ratio. Since effective altruists believe that putting cost-effectiveness at the heart of the charity assessment guarantees identifying the charities which have the greatest positive impact with the lowest resources possible, GiveWell fulfils the urge of effective altruists to discover what they call effective charities. GiveWell also considers the evidence of effectiveness (apart from cost-effectiveness), the room for more funding, and transparency. Today, many effective altruists consult GiveWell when choosing which charities to donate to. Their work is so central to effective altruism that a website run by the Centre for Effective Altruism has included GiveWell under "EA Concepts" which are composed of ideas, problems and organisations most relevant to effective altruism.<sup>179</sup>

As of 2020, GiveWell judges that Against Malaria Foundation, Schistosomiasis Control Initiative Foundation, and GiveDirectly are among the top charities.<sup>180</sup> There are other selected charities which have top programs, such as Malaria Consortium (Seasonal Malaria Chemoprevention), Evidence Action (Deworm the World Initiative), The END Fund (Deworming Program), Sightsavers (Deworming Program), Helen Keller International (Vitamin A Supplementation Program).<sup>181</sup> Except for GiveDirectly which transfers unconditional cash directly to the people living in extreme poverty, and for Helen Keller International's vitamin deficiency-focused program, all of GiveWell's top charities work on preventable diseases exacerbated by extreme poverty affecting hundreds of millions of people.

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<sup>179</sup> "GiveWell's Recommendations," Effective Altruism, July 2020, [concepts.effectivealtruism.org/concepts/givewells-recommendations](https://concepts.effectivealtruism.org/concepts/givewells-recommendations).

<sup>180</sup> As of 2020.

<sup>181</sup> As of 2020.

#### 4.2.1 Limitations of GiveWell

There are limitations of the methodology used for designating effective charities. GiveWell extensively explains these limitations.<sup>182</sup> For instance, GiveWell appeals to representative studies which may not provide us with the whole picture. Because of the data limitations on the long-term consequences of interventions, GiveWell has to assess quantifiable, and immediate and short-term impacts of interventions. The unintended effects and long-term effects are for the most part omitted. Moreover, in some cases, there could be extremely limited information about social conditions, and hence the estimates based on this extremely limited information may significantly weaken the estimates.

There may also be a value conflict between the evaluators, donors, and the beneficiaries. The moral weight of the value of income versus health, and the value of averting the death of young children versus adults may be interpreted differently by each party.<sup>183</sup> Through surveys, GiveWell has started to include the opinions of the extremely poor, who are the beneficiaries, in assigning relevant moral values.<sup>184</sup> The results demonstrate that the extremely poor "place a higher value on averting a death than predicted by most extrapolations from studies in high income countries (HICs)", and the "central estimate of value placed on

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<sup>182</sup> "Cost-Effectiveness," GiveWell, November 2017, [givewell.org/how-we-work/our-criteria/cost-effectiveness](https://www.givewell.org/how-we-work/our-criteria/cost-effectiveness).

<sup>183</sup> "Approaches to Moral Weights: How GiveWell Compares to Other Actors," GiveWell, November 2017, <https://www.givewell.org/how-we-work/our-criteria/cost-effectiveness/comparing-moral-weights>.

<sup>184</sup> "Research on Moral Weights - 2019," GiveWell, December 2019, <https://www.givewell.org/how-we-work/our-criteria/cost-effectiveness/2019-moral-weights-research>.

averting death for individuals 5 and older was \$40,721, which is 1.7 times higher than the current GiveWell staff median".<sup>185</sup> Results also show that the extremely poor "consistently value the lives of individuals under 5 higher than individuals 5 and older, which is consistent with HIC studies but contrary to median GiveWell moral weights", where the "central estimate of value placed on averting death for individuals under 5 was \$65,906, which is 4.9 times higher than the current GiveWell staff median".<sup>186</sup> Moreover, before collecting opinions from the extremely poor about this, GiveWell thought that averting the death of individuals under 5 is 48 times more important than the value of doubling consumption, and that averting the death of individuals at the age of 5 or over 5 was 85 times more important than the value of doubling consumption.<sup>187</sup> In other words, they valued saving the life of those 5 and over as almost twice as valuable as saving the life of an under 5. After doing the moral weighting research with the extremely poor, they equalised the values and thought that averting the death of individuals at any age is 100 times more important than doubling consumption. Donors may disagree with the outputs of these surveys. These disagreements are not peculiar to GiveWell's work. They represent the difficulties of comparing charities, which involves attaching values to specific circumstances like averting death, increasing consumption, and comparing the moral value of averting death across different age groups.

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<sup>185</sup> IDinsight, *Beneficiary Preferences: Findings from Ghana and Kenya*, (IDinsight, 2019): 5. [https://files.givewell.org/files/DWDA%202009/IDinsight/IDinsight\\_Beneficiary\\_Preferences\\_Final\\_Report\\_November\\_2019.pdf](https://files.givewell.org/files/DWDA%202009/IDinsight/IDinsight_Beneficiary_Preferences_Final_Report_November_2019.pdf).

<sup>186</sup> IDinsight, 5.

<sup>187</sup> "Research on Moral Weights - 2019," GiveWell.

Another limitation is that GiveWell has a moral assumption about what the good is and how the good should be distributed, when it compares the moral value of averting death and the moral value of increasing consumption. The assumption is that they think the moral value of averting death and the moral value of increasing consumption are commensurable. As mentioned above, GiveWell states that averting death is morally preferable to increasing consumption and hence reducing poverty to some degree. Averting death surely brings about some good. According to GiveWell, when assessing the goodness of averting death, some GiveWell evaluators "have considered factors such as life expectancy, how someone's degree of personhood develops as they age, the level of grief associated with death at different ages, economic contributions made by people at different ages, etc."<sup>188</sup> Increasing consumption and hence reducing poverty has also positive effects on welfare. For instance, when there is increased consumption, there is less malnutrition, and when there is less malnutrition, there is less susceptibility to diseases. Those with increased consumption are also likely to contribute more to economic and social life. What is being compared here are the welfare effects of preserving and extending life, and the welfare effects of increasing consumption. This may be a controversial move: some may think that it needs a clearer justification.

One of the other serious limitations of GiveWell might be that it is not clear whether it includes the well-being future generations to its evaluation. For instance, do donations make any welfare difference in the lives of the new children brought to our world by the extremely poor who are the beneficiaries? If yes, are the welfare

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<sup>188</sup> "Research on Moral Weights - 2019," GiveWell.



effects on future generations significant enough to reconsider our donation decisions? Is there any discount rate for future generations? These questions have not been answered by GiveWell and we have no clue how these questions might alter their decision-making process.

Above are some of the limitations that the evaluations of GiveWell have. Despite these limitations, GiveWell's research has always been very valuable. Nonetheless, one of the most serious objections to donating is more fundamental, namely, the systemic change objection, which states that effective altruism unjustifiably distracts individuals from allocating their spare resources to systemic change. GiveWell only measures charities against *each other*. But the most effective charity is not necessarily the most effective way for us to fight extreme poverty. Perhaps the charities claimed to be effective are not in fact effective, as they are only interested in bringing about improvements in the lives of extremely poor but they do not undermine the unjust nature of global order? Perhaps they waste resources because they divert attention from other kinds of movement combatting extreme poverty? Perhaps their insistence on remedying the suffering caused by the "symptoms" of extreme poverty only creates a vicious cycle where the "systemic causes" of extreme poverty are either neglected or exacerbated? To respond these questions and to assess the rigour of the systemic change objection, we first need to refer to the empirical research about extreme poverty to understand the nature of extreme poverty.

### 4.3 Empirical research on extreme poverty

Especially on the progressive side of politics, there is a tendency to argue that there are "systemic causes" of extreme poverty as opposed to "symptoms" of extreme poverty. Proposing a radical transformation in the status quo, philosophers who support the systemic change objection against effective altruism often buy the distinction between systemic causes and symptoms. Illicit financial flows, foreign debt, war and military spending, inheritance laws, and colonialism are claimed to be among the systemic causes of extreme poverty. These are thought to be structural and their presence enforces the idea that the struggle against extreme poverty will not prove to be fruitful unless they are eroded. Contrasted with systemic causes, preventable diseases such as malaria and neglected tropical diseases are treated as some of the symptoms of extreme poverty. Malaria and neglected tropical diseases are two of the most emphasised preventable diseases by effective altruists. While there are no charities recommended by GiveWell which work on the systemic causes of extreme poverty, many of GiveWell's recommended charities work on preventable diseases.

As we will see in the later sections of this chapter, it is commonly thought that the systemic causes of extreme poverty are more serious than the symptoms of extreme poverty. The word "serious" can be understood in multiple ways. The first is that it points at the judgement that by targeting the systemic causes of extreme poverty, we can maximise the available resources to combat extreme poverty, so only or mostly tackling the symptoms of extreme poverty is relatively unfruitful. Relatedly, the second is that by treating the systemic causes of extreme poverty, we can mostly address the symptoms of extreme poverty.

Most of the philosophical discussion around what constitutes the systemic causes and symptoms of extreme poverty is about the *credence* that we lend to the proposed solutions concerning extreme poverty: emphasising that we should be focusing on the systemic causes rather than symptoms of extreme poverty may trigger us to feel sympathetic to solutions such as systemic change through lobbying, mobilisation and revolution to which we would not be otherwise sympathetic, and perhaps reflect more on the ones we are uncertain about. Appealing to the gravity of the systemic causes of extreme poverty and requiring systemic change, the systemic change objection accuses effective altruism of being fundamentally flawed, and brings the philosophical puzzles concerning low-risk actions versus high-risk actions under scrutiny. After presenting important empirical data on extreme poverty, I analyse these philosophical puzzles with respect to the rigour of the systemic change objection against effective altruism.

Before starting to analyse the systemic causes and the symptoms of extreme poverty, I should note that there is one famous estimate of Jeffrey D. Sachs regarding the eradication of extreme poverty. According to Sachs, the cost to meet the Millennium Development Goals which include eradicating extreme poverty would have required \$135 billion to \$195 billion per year between 2005-2015 "which is about .44 to .54 percent of the rich-world GNP each year during the [then] forthcoming decade".<sup>189</sup> The total figure to end extreme poverty between 2005-2015 sums up to less than \$2 trillion. Although Sachs acknowledges that there is some degree of imprecision around these estimates, we should still

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<sup>189</sup> Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 299.

keep these figures in mind while analysing the systemic causes and the symptoms of extreme poverty.

#### 4.3.1 Illicit financial flows

Illicit financial flows is an umbrella term for different malpractices such as tax injustice through transfer mispricing and tax havens, smuggling, and corruption by officials. For instance, misinvoicing flows include changing the true value of goods so as to evade tax. Likewise, illicit hot money flows are realised through infiltration, such as by hiding and transporting money internationally so as to decrease tax liability or manipulate and destruct economies. These practices result in a decrease in resources which could otherwise be used for public services such as funding healthcare, education, and promoting opportunity and equality.

Global Financial Integrity reports that Sub-Saharan Africa lost a nominal \$528.9 billion between 2002-2013 alone because of illicit financial flows.<sup>190</sup> This indicates an average loss of 5.5% of its GDP.<sup>191</sup> Asia lost a nominal \$2,655.6 billion in the same period.<sup>192</sup> This translates into an average loss of 3.7% of its GDP.<sup>193</sup> All developing countries lost a nominal \$6,587.1 billion in total which comprised of a nominal \$5,101.1 billion for trade misinvoicing flows and a nominal \$1,486.0 billion for illicit hot money flows.<sup>194</sup> The loss

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<sup>190</sup> Dev Kar and Joseph Spanjers, *Illicit Financial Flows from Developing Countries: 2003-2012* (Global Financial Integrity, 2014), 7.

<sup>191</sup> Kar and Spanjers, 11.

<sup>192</sup> Kar and Spanjers, 7.

<sup>193</sup> Kar and Spanjers, 11.

<sup>194</sup> Kar and Spanjers, viii.

of all developing countries accounts for an average of 3.9% of their GDP.<sup>195</sup> For all developing countries, the combined real illicit financial flows add up to \$6,840.5 between 2002-2013 alone.<sup>196</sup> The total foreign direct investment and official development aid combined were slightly less than illicit financial flows.<sup>197</sup> According to Janvier D. Nkurunziza from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development,

Illicit financial flows increase risk and uncertainty in the domestic economy, discouraging investment and its potential positive effect on poverty reduction. Moreover, in countries where corruption allows the elites to unlawfully appropriate resources and transfer them abroad, the incentive to put in place economic and social measures that reduce poverty is weakened. Illicit financial flows allow the elites to easily access foreign services such as healthcare and education, leaving the poor to fend for themselves.<sup>198</sup>

One form of illicit financial flows called transfer mispricing is often done by multinational companies. Transfer mispricing allows multinational companies to evade tax which "keeps states from

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<sup>195</sup> Kar and Spanjers, 11.

<sup>196</sup> Kar and Spanjers, 7.

<sup>197</sup> Kar and Spanjers, vii.

<sup>198</sup> Janvier D. Nkurunziza, "Illicit Financial Flows: A Constraint on Poverty Reduction in Africa," *Association of Concerned Africa Scholars Bulletin* 87, (2012): 16.

devoting maximum available resources to human rights".<sup>199</sup> It "impedes the fulfilment of the right to development".<sup>200</sup> It also "damages accountability and transparency".<sup>201</sup>

Illicit financial flows diminish the quality of life of the extremely poor and reproduce the conditions bringing about extreme poverty. By deliberately avoiding paying tax, those who are engaged in illicit financial flows attack the rights and the welfare of the extremely poor. In that regard, illicit financial flows deny the access of the extremely poor to current and potential improvements in their income and the infrastructure that they can benefit from. Obstructing current and potential improvements signifies making the extremely poor poorer with respect to the opportunities that could have been seized and taking away their wealth to which they are entitled. In other words, illicit financial flows not only tarnish the principles of distributive justice but also contribute to extreme poverty by shifting resources from those who need them. Some of those resources could have been used to build hospitals, schools, and roads which would drastically increase the chances of eliminating preventable diseases, providing better skills training, and lowering unemployment. For instance, global medical research funding, public and industry combined, was \$265 billion in 2011.<sup>202</sup> If we had avoided illicit financial flows only between 2002-2013, we could

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<sup>199</sup> Monica Iyer, "Transferring Away Human Rights: Using Human Rights to Address Corporate Transfer Mispricing," *Northwestern Journal of Human Rights* 15, no. 1 (2017): 10.

<sup>200</sup> Iyer, 13.

<sup>201</sup> Iyer, 17.

<sup>202</sup> Hamilton Moses III, David H. M. Matheson, Sarah Cairns-Smith, Benjamin P. George, Chase Palisch, and E. Ray Dorsey, "The Anatomy of Medical Research: US and International Comparisons," *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 313, no. 2 (2015): 181.

have almost 25 times more global medical research funding in 2013 than we had in 2011. Most of this could have been used for curing the diseases that the extremely poor suffer from.

There is, of course, no guarantee that the public funds generated by the elimination of illicit financial flows would end up being used for the extremely poor. Those resources could be used towards a variety of causes. But the elimination of illicit financial flows is very important for creating the maximum available resources for states which, through rational planning and just procedures, could alleviate extreme poverty. Without the maximum available resources, the potential funds for extreme poverty diminish, and there is more pressure on the decision-making procedure to restrict resources devoted to alleviating extreme poverty.

#### 4.3.2 Foreign debt

Foreign debt is a debt owed by states to states, banks, financial institutions and individual creditors. Low-income countries owe money usually with interest rates charged to high-income countries, international banks, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The discussion around foreign debt and extreme poverty is a sensitive one, and the literature is composed of nuanced opinions. Nonetheless, there are figures which demonstrate that rising foreign debt in low and middle-income countries is likely to worsen extreme poverty.

According to the World Bank Group, the foreign debt stock of the International Development Association-only countries which include the world's poorest had risen to \$356 billion by the end of

2017, 11% higher than 2016.<sup>203</sup> The World Bank Group notes that the external debt stock of International Development Association-only countries over the past decade has doubled.<sup>204</sup> Moreover, the interest rates are also a concern:

At end 2017, one third of countries in [Sub-Saharan Africa] had a debt service-to-export ratio above 10 percent, and in several, including Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya and Zambia that ratio surpassed 15 percent. In the future, higher debt service payments, in part due to bullet repayments falling due on maturing international bond issues, coupled with rising global interest rates, look set to keep debt-to-export ratios on an upward trajectory, exacerbating concerns about debt sustainability.<sup>205</sup>

The presence of interest rates carries the risk that many of the total amount borrowed will have to be repaid many times over, if interest rates generate a debt that is greater than the original debt.

Research suggests that Sub-Saharan Africa's growth rate would have averaged almost 50% higher during the 1980s if the foreign debt had been absent.<sup>206</sup> Likewise, research on 25 low and middle-income countries between 2000-2015 has found that a 1%

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<sup>203</sup> World Bank Group, *International Debt Statistics 2019* (World Bank Group, 2019), 8.

<sup>204</sup> World Bank Group, 8.

<sup>205</sup> World Bank Group, 11.

<sup>206</sup> Augustin Kwasi Fosu, "The External Debt Burden and Economic Growth in the 1980s: Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 20, no. 2 (1999): 315.



increase in foreign debt increases poverty by 0.35%.<sup>207</sup> Unfortunately, low-income countries without debt sustainability are likely to be dependent on subsidies from donors.<sup>208</sup>

Alarmingly, using observations for 78 low and middle-income countries between 1976-1998, there is empirical evidence that autocratic regimes, as opposed to democratic regimes, accumulate considerably more foreign debt compared to their income.<sup>209</sup> The fact that billions have been borrowed by dictators in Africa and Asia from foreign creditors which eventually have to be repaid by the public over very long-term puts into question the legitimacy of the obligation to repay the foreign debt. Given that many low-income countries are already striving to escape the loop of extreme poverty, they have to allocate their resources to pay their foreign debt with interest rates charged rather than using them to cope with extreme poverty. For instance, just \$7.5 billion of the \$356 billion foreign debt of International Development Association-only countries at end of 2017 would have been sufficient to provide vaccination to 300 million children in low and middle-income countries which would have saved 6 million lives and generated up to \$100 billion in economic benefits.<sup>210</sup>

#### 4.3.3 War and military spending

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<sup>207</sup> Taha Zaghdoudi and Abdelaziz Hakimi, "Does external debt-poverty relationship confirm the debtoverhang hypothesis for developing counties?," *Economics Bulletin* 37, no. 2 (2017): 658.

<sup>208</sup> Kathrin Berensmann, "New Ways of Achieving Debt Sustainability beyond the Enhanced HIPC Initiative," *Intereconomics* 39, no. 6 (2004): 330.

<sup>209</sup> Thomas Oatley, "Political Institutions and Foreign Debt in the Developing World," *International Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2010): 191.

<sup>210</sup> Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, *Gavi Pledging Conference 2016-2020: Chair's Summary*, (Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, 2015), 1.

War and military spending has increased the destructive force of our civilisation. Since the rapid growth of military capacities, and the invention of mass weapons such as nuclear and biological weapons, many people have lost their lives and there has been a constant threat to the welfare of the global population.

Jonathan Goodhand states that "There is some consensus around the proposition that conflict causes poverty. . . famine, pestilence, death and war riding together has been invoked in times of crisis through the ages".<sup>211</sup> A decade-long war could lead a society to have an income 20% lower than it would otherwise have been, as the annual growth rate could diminish by 2.2%.<sup>212</sup> A 15-year war could decrease GDP per capita by 30%.<sup>213</sup> War also harms the potential of human capital: when the Tajikistani civil war ended, it was found in 1999 that "girls aged between seven and fifteen were about eleven percentage points significantly less likely to be enrolled in school if their household's dwelling was damaged during the war".<sup>214</sup> Likewise, Mozambique's civil war between 1974-1995 resulted in the collapse of primary schools at an average annual rate of destruction and erosion about 6% (1983-1991).<sup>215</sup> 88% of the

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<sup>211</sup> Jonathan Goodhand, "Violent Conflict, Poverty and Chronic Poverty," Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper 6, Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2001, 12.

<sup>212</sup> Paul Collier, "On the economic consequences of civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers* 51, no. 1 (1999): 175.

<sup>213</sup> Collier, 175-176.

<sup>214</sup> Olga Shemyakina, "The effect of armed conflict on accumulation of schooling: Results from Tajikistan," *Journal of Development Economics* 95, no. 2 (2011): 196.

<sup>215</sup> Tilman Brück, "Macroeconomic Effects of the War in Mozambique," Queen Elizabeth House Working Paper 11, University of Oxford, 1997, 40.

children between 6-15 at the time of war witnessed physical abuse and/or torture, 64% of them were abducted from their families, and 28% of them were trained for combat.<sup>216</sup> All of these and similar costs of war result in a lower future income, lower health and education prospects, and lower life satisfaction. For instance, during the Burundi civil war, urban poverty rose from 40.9% to 65.8% between 1993-2003, and rural poverty rose from 39.6% to 70.4% for the same period.<sup>217</sup> Given that many of the countries in Africa and Asia still suffer from civil wars and other armed conflicts, it is obvious that the negative effects of wars will exacerbate extreme poverty by depriving people of income and better health, and undermining the capacity of the state to provide public services which could otherwise have led to development.

Apart from the destructive and expensive business of war, resources reserved for the military are gigantic. For instance, in 2017 the United States of America spent more than \$600 billion, India spent more than \$63 billion, Taiwan spent more than \$10 billion, Indonesia spent more than \$8 billion, and Sri Lanka spent more than \$1 billion on the military. In the same year, the world spent more than \$1.7 trillion on its militaries, which is 2.2% of global GDP.<sup>218</sup> Theoretically, the higher the military spending the higher the potential harm to the world through military interventions because of

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<sup>216</sup> Neil Boothby, Abubacar Sultan and Peter Upton, "Children of Mozambique: The Cost of Survival," (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1991), 5-6.

<sup>217</sup> International Money Fund, "Burundi: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper," Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, International Money Fund, 2007, 124.

<sup>218</sup> Nan Tian, Aude Fleurant, Alexandra Kuimova, Pieter D. Wezeman and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in World Military Expenditure*, 2017 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018): 1.

ever-evolving destructive technologies.<sup>219</sup> Therefore, military spending does not only go towards weapons, military outfits, upkeep of barracks and intelligence services which enhances the capacity of the military. Rather, military spending increases the risk of an increased death toll, people being disabled both physically and psychologically, sexual assaults, the destruction of social networks, forced migration, the exploitation of natural resources, and the demolition of habitable places. Possibly, it also increases the chances of an arms race posing a threat to global peace.

Given that we have scarce resources, each resource allocated to the military is a resource taken away from alleviating extreme poverty. With the resources reserved for the military, there could be many improvements made in public services which could improve the lives of the extremely poor: recall Sachs' estimate that we needed less than \$2 trillion to have met the Millenium Development Goals (including the goal of ending extreme poverty) in every country. Provided that Sachs' estimate was relatively precise, then only the 2 years' global military spending at 2017 levels would meet the target to end extreme poverty worldwide. The current estimates to end poverty may be higher, but we could still safely conclude that if we divert the resources from military to alleviate extreme poverty we could significantly reduce extreme poverty, if not all of it.

#### 4.3.4 Inheritance laws

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<sup>219</sup> Admittedly, by having a deterrence effect, military power and hence military spending prevents some harm. After all, states and parties reach some form of stalemate when there are armies ready to wage a war or defend themselves. But this does not rule out the possibility that in a possible world where there had been no military and thus military spending, the total harm could have been less, and with the resources not allocated to the military, we could have ended extreme poverty.

Inheritance laws regulate the transfer process of wealth between the deceased and their inheritors. In almost every country, inheritance laws transfer the wealth of the deceased to their relatives. Inheritance laws have endured through different political systems and paradigm shifts yet have sustained their basic tendency to transfer wealth on the basis of kinship.

There are three points to make. Firstly, inheritance laws which prioritise distributing the wealth of the deceased to their relatives have to be questioned if we believe that most of the wealth created by individuals arises from their coincidental privileges, or, luck. Secondly, even if we assume that all of the individual wealth has been gained through personal labour, it does not necessarily follow that one has the moral authority to decide to whom to bequeath all of that wealth. Thirdly, there is empirical evidence that global wealth is increasingly concentrated in the rich, and parallelly, inheritance laws result in transferring more wealth to the relatives of the rich which means that inheritance laws become more and more problematic for the extremely poor. The first and the second points are philosophical points which I have previously raised in this thesis (Chapter 2) and I leave them aside here. The third point is an empirical point which stresses the way in which extreme poverty can be aggravated through inheritance laws. All of these points propel us to question the current form of inheritance laws as inheritance laws clearly benefit the rich and keep the wealth away from the extremely poor.

Studying inheritance flows in France, Thomas Piketty argues that

In the central scenario, simulations based on the theoretical model (which successfully accounts for the evolutions of 1820–2010) suggest that the annual inheritance flow would continue to grow until 2030–2040 and then stabilize at around 16–17 percent of national income. According to the alternative scenario, the inheritance flow should increase even more until 2060–2070 and then stabilize at around 24–25 percent of national income, a level similar to that observed in 1870–1910. In the first case, inherited wealth would make only a partial comeback; in the second, its comeback would be complete (as far as the total amount of inheritances and gifts is concerned). In both cases, the flow of inheritances and gifts in the twenty-first century is expected to be quite high, and in particular much higher than it was during the exceptionally low phase observed in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>220</sup>

According to another report focusing on 1989–2008, in the United States of America, there were different levels of wealth transfer for different income levels. For instance, if you were earning between \$15.000–\$24.999 in 1998, then you would have ended up receiving an average of \$246.700 (in 2007 dollars) in inheritance.<sup>221</sup> If you were earning \$250.000 or more, then you would have ended up

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<sup>220</sup> Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 398.

<sup>221</sup> Edward N. Wolff and Maury Gittleman, "United States Department of Labor, Inheritances and the Distribution of Wealth Or Whatever Happened to the Great Inheritance Boom?", United States Bureau of Labor Statistics Working Paper 445, 2011, 33.

receiving an average of \$2.678,4 million (in 2007 dollars) in inheritance.<sup>222</sup> For the period between 1998-2007, almost all of the recipients received the inheritance from their relatives.<sup>223</sup> Although researchers did not conclude that the inequality of wealth transfers increased over time, they "found first of all that the inequality of wealth transfers is extremely high".<sup>224</sup> They state that:

From 1989 to 1998, the mean value of wealth transfers generally increased among the lower wealth classes but declined among the upper wealth classes with the notable exception of the top one percent, which experienced a 77 percent gain. From 1998 to 2007, in contrast, all wealth classes enjoyed increases in the mean value of wealth transfers, with the exception of the second and third. Over the full 18 years, the bottom two wealth classes as well as the top (\$1,000,000 or more) saw their mean transfers go down whereas the four in the middle saw gains. The top one percent saw their transfers surge by 143 percent.<sup>225</sup>

We need not establish a precise correlation between income and wealth transfers. Some people who have been lucky to be born in the United States of America are lucky enough to receive tremendous wealth. 1% of the United States of America has

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<sup>222</sup> Wolff and Gittleman, 33.

<sup>223</sup> Wolff and Gittleman, 31.

<sup>224</sup> Wolff and Gittleman, 24.

<sup>225</sup> Wolff and Gittleman, 15.

especially witnessed an immense wealth transfer during the years researched. Compare these people to the extremely poor. A mere difference between where one is born, to which family one is born, and the current inheritance laws on the basis of biological ties restrict wealth transfer between different people in different families. If you are one of the extremely poor in Uganda, then you will either inherit some dilapidated shack and some personal goods or nothing at all. Is this fair that you get nothing just because you are born in Uganda as one of the extremely poor? Apart from it being unfair, the extremely poor person deprived of their potential: if this wealth had been allocated in a more balanced way globally, then it could have made a significance difference in tackling extreme poverty.

Inheritance laws radically favour the members of already rich families and radically disfavour the members of already poor families. There is no morally relevant reason why all, or even most, of the wealth should be left to the biological family of the deceased. The current biology-centred inheritance laws are unfair, and the lack of global cooperation to radically transform inheritance laws for the benefit of the extremely poor slows the pace of the struggle against extreme poverty—we may need an *international* inheritance tax, collected by global organisations, to alleviate extreme poverty. Inheritance laws prevent unlucky individuals, such as the extremely poor, from claiming their fair share of wealth, and legally (but not morally) justifies the possession of wealth by lucky individuals or the rich. By globally limiting the distribution of wealth and sustaining it among the rich, inheritance laws are apt to make the extremely poor actually and potentially poorer. Inheritance laws perpetuate existing inequalities through generations. They entrench wealth in the hands of a few, and so stand in opposition to alleviating global poverty.



#### 4.3.5 Colonialism

Colonialism is the domination of one group over another with oppression, exploitation, and discrimination. Colonial practices date back to ancient times but they were especially violent between 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century when empires sought to reinforce their authority through colonialism. Many scholars appeal to colonialism as a factor in explaining why we have extreme poverty today and why the extremely poor have been centred in the colonised regions of the world.

Jason Hickel draws attention to the economic advantage that Europe gained from Latin America's silver and gold, where extensive theft took place. Hickel states that

By the early 1800s, a total of 100 million kilograms of silver had been drained from Latin America and pumped into the European economy – first into Spain, and then out to the rest of Europe as payment on Spain's debts.

To get a sense of the scale of this wealth, consider this thought experiment: if 100 million kilograms of silver was invested in 1800 at 5 per cent interest – the historical average – it would amount to \$165 trillion today, more than double the world's total GDP in 2015. Europe had to purchase some of this silver from indigenous Americans in exchange for goods, of

course, but much of it came for free – the product of coercive extraction.<sup>226</sup>

Hickel also stresses the massacres, forced dispossession, and the diseases that Europeans brought with them which killed most of the Latin American population between the end of 1400s and the middle of 1600s (according to one estimate, 95% of the entire Latin American population had been killed).<sup>227</sup> Hickel states that the United States of America benefited from 222,505,049 hours of forced labour which happened between 1619 and the abolition of slavery in 1865.<sup>228</sup> According to one estimate, it is worth \$97 trillion in 1993 terms.<sup>229</sup> By abusing the bodies and the social conditions of the slaves who could otherwise contribute to the local economy, and forcing the colonised regions to produce limited agricultural products, colonialism prevented the growth of domestic industries.<sup>230</sup> For instance, British colonisers forced Indians to cultivate crops to export rather than allowing them to cultivate crops for subsistence.<sup>231</sup> Enclosure and privatisation of forests and water sources were a norm.<sup>232</sup> Under the British colonisers who enclosed and privatised the commons, 30 million people starved to death

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<sup>226</sup> Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and its Solutions* (London: William Heinemann, 2017), 136 (e-book).

<sup>227</sup> Hickel, 140.

<sup>228</sup> Hickel, 141.

<sup>229</sup> Hickel, 141.

<sup>230</sup> Hickel, 143.

<sup>231</sup> Hickel, 143.

<sup>232</sup> Hickel, 165.

when El Niño struck.<sup>233</sup> The dichotomy between the core (colonising regions) and the periphery (colonised regions) proved to be harmful to the latter: firstly, the prices of the primary commodity exports in the colonised regions decreased relative to the prices of the manufactured goods they managed to import, that is, the wealth was transferred to the colonisers, and secondly, the wages in the colonised regions for the goods they traded were lower than the colonising regions which meant that they were undercompensated.<sup>234</sup> Hickel concludes that: "By the end of the colonial period, the periphery was losing \$22 billion each year as a result of unequal exchange, which is equivalent to \$161 billion in 2015 dollars. That is twice the amount of aid and investment that the periphery was receiving each year during the same period. This arrangement became a major driver of global inequality".<sup>235</sup>

Regarding colonialism, Daren Acemoglu and James A. Robinson state that "Colonialism didn't just freeze Africa and remove the possibility for endogenous reform, it created structures which have subsequently inhibited economic growth".<sup>236</sup> Take South Africa's "dual economy" as an example.<sup>237</sup> The dual economy consists of the modern economic sectors and the traditional sectors in rural areas. 87% of the land was allocated to Europeans who represent 20% of the population, which means that Europeans were

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<sup>233</sup> Hickel, 167.

<sup>234</sup> Hickel, 193.

<sup>235</sup> Hickel, 193-194.

<sup>236</sup> Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, "Why is Africa Poor?," *Economic History of Developing Regions* 25, no. 1 (2010): 39.

<sup>237</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson, 34.

disproportionately favoured.<sup>238</sup> Africans were not allowed to start a business on the European side, and, for instance, they were banned from having a skilled job in the mining sector.<sup>239</sup> Known as the "colour bar", this distinction was expanded to the entire economy.<sup>240</sup> Whereas the elite Europeans got richer, Africans were deprived of what they had would have otherwise gained. South Africa is one of the many examples in Africa where a sharp divide between the colonisers and the colonised was present, and colonial practices deepened extreme poverty in one way or another.

In short, wealth, welfare, and power had been moved to the colonising regions at the expense of the colonised regions. By leaving a legacy of impoverishment and unfair advantage, colonialism contributed to the inception of extreme poverty, and its after-effects have impaired the potentials of people and regions. Surely, it is not a coincidence that extreme poverty predominantly exists in Africa, Asia and South America, as opposed to Europe and North America.

There could be different fronts to combat the residues of colonialism. The first could be working on a progressive global scheme to neutralise the negative global outcomes of colonialism through conducting in-depth economic and social research. The second could be initiating a global compensation for the systemic deprivation caused by colonialism—may it be in the form of debt cancellation or a binding treaty for resource reallocation from the colonising world to the colonised world. This may also include questioning international borders, and questioning the status quo of

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<sup>238</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson, 36.

<sup>239</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson, 37.

<sup>240</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson, 37.

keeping some resources within national borders: we may need a rethink of the legitimacy of borders in general. The third could be restructuring some of the major international organisations, such as reshaping the United Nations Security Council which has the power to authorise military action. All of these should be buttressed by rapid democratisation in similar dominant institutions to secure a fair representation of the colonised regions. These initiatives could boost the speed of alleviating extreme poverty and may lead a paradigm shift about how we think about extreme poverty.

#### 4.3.6 Malaria

The alarming rate of malaria is usually thought to be a symptom of extreme poverty. Prevalent in Africa, Asia and Latin America, malaria is one of the common but preventable diseases which puts 21.94% of Africa's population at risk (globally it is 5.91%).<sup>241</sup> It is estimated that 435,000 people were killed by malaria in 2017 alone.<sup>242</sup> The population at risk in Africa translates into hundreds of millions of people. The direct economic costs of avoiding and treating malaria, and its indirect economics costs, harms the worst-off more than others: for example, in Malawi, annual spending for malaria treatment, malaria prevention and indirect economic costs accounted for 32.1% of average annual income among very low-income households and only 4.7% of

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<sup>241</sup> World Health Organization, *Malaria Report 2018*, (World Health Organization, 2018): 41.

<sup>242</sup> World Health Organization, 42.

average annual income among low to high-income households.<sup>243</sup> The economic cost of malaria to poor households can be especially severe when the sick individual is a productive member of the household, particularly the primary income-earner. Other household labour may be diverted from income-generating activities to care for sick family members. Reduced productivity and time away from work could reduce household income. According to a study in Sri Lanka, "on average patients bore 74% of the economic costs of [malaria]".<sup>244</sup> In one study in Kenya, compared to other determining factors of school absenteeism such as lack of exam fees, books, or pens and unspecified illness, it was found that malaria was the leading cause of school absence with a rate of 39.6% of all the days missed.<sup>245</sup> In another study, it was detected that cerebral malaria led to withdrawn/depressed problems (15.6%), thought problems (12.5%), aggressive behaviour (9.4%) and oppositional behaviour (9.4%) in Ugandan children.<sup>246</sup> Although it is a preventable disease, malaria is life-threatening and its economic and social costs on poor children, families and states are overwhelming as 200,500 million out

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<sup>243</sup> M. B. Ettling, Deborah A. MacFarland, Linda J. Schultz and Lester Chitsulo, "Economic impact of malaria in Malawian households," *Tropical Medicine and Parasitology* 45, no. 1 (1994): 78.

<sup>244</sup> Nimal Attanayake, Julia Fox-Rushby and Anne Mills, "Household costs of 'malaria' morbidity: a study in Matale district, Sri Lanka," *Tropical Medicine and International Health* 5, no. 9 (2000): 601.

<sup>245</sup> Nia King, Cate Dewey and David Borish, "Determinants of Primary School Non- Enrollment and Absenteeism: Results from a Retrospective, Convergent Mixed Methods, Cohort Study in Rural Western Kenya," *PLoS ONE* 10, no. 9 (2015): 7.

<sup>246</sup> Paul Bangirana, Noeline Nakasujja, Bruna Giordani, Robert O. Opoka, Chandy C. John and Michael J. Boivin, "Reliability of the Luganda version of the Child Behaviour Checklist in measuring behavioural problems after cerebral malaria," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health* 3, no. 38 (2009): 4.

of 219,000 million estimated malaria cases by World Health Organization in 2017 were in Africa.<sup>247</sup> All of these studies show that malaria puts a very high burden on the extremely poor.

To reduce the malaria case incidence and the subsequent mortality risk by 90% globally by 2030, it is estimated that \$101.8 billion is needed over 15 years: it means that we need 40% more investment than now.<sup>248</sup> Given the burden of malaria on extreme poverty, achieving that would drastically ameliorate the lives of the extremely poor. They would harvest more and earn more, the failure of inaccessible health services would not make them lose time and energy, children could invest in their future by being able to continue their studies, and other benefits from slowing down malaria would follow. As the number of cases of malaria is strikingly high, wiping out malaria has the potential of positively affecting the entire continent of Africa and countries where extreme poverty is widespread.

#### 4.3.7 Neglected tropical diseases

The prevalence of neglected tropical diseases is commonly thought to be a symptom of extreme poverty. These are several diseases which are comparable to malaria in terms of their effects and extent. They include Buruli ulcer, Chagas disease, dengue and chikungunya, dracunculiasis (guinea-worm disease), echinococcosis, foodborne trematodiasis, Human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), leishmaniasis, leprosy

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<sup>247</sup> World Health Organization, *Malaria Report 2018*, 37.

<sup>248</sup> Edith Patouillard, Jamie Griffin, Samir Bhatt, Azra Ghani and Richard Cibulskis, "Global investment targets for malaria control and elimination between 2016 and 2030," *BMJ Global Health* 2, no. e000176 (2017): 6.

(Hansen's disease), lymphatic filariasis, mycetoma, chromoblastomycosis and other deep mycoses, onchocerciasis (river blindness), rabies, scabies and other ectoparasites, schistosomiasis, soil-transmitted helminthiases, snakebite envenoming, taeniasis/cysticercosis, trachoma, yaws (endemic treponematoses).<sup>249</sup> By affecting hundreds of millions of people and killing 170,000 people annually, neglected tropical diseases impair health, family income, and the economic productivity of the worst-off in Africa, Asia and Latin America.<sup>250</sup> The solution to neglected tropical diseases is increasing access to health services and getting people treated through correct public policies, and it is viable to eliminate neglected tropical diseases if the funding is increased.

Neglected tropical diseases have immense externalities. Known or suspected blinding trachoma cases show an annual potential productivity loss of US\$2.9 billion (in 1995 terms and 1998 productivity measures).<sup>251</sup> Febrile illnesses including dengue left 67% of infected households in debt in which their debt is "more than double the average amount households spent on food in 2 weeks (mean US\$ 9.5 per week prior to interview)".<sup>252</sup> Another example is helminth: its elimination, the Human Development Index (HDI), and fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are

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<sup>249</sup> "Neglected tropical diseases," World Health Organisation, accessed May 15, 2020, [https://www.who.int/neglected\\_diseases/diseases/en/](https://www.who.int/neglected_diseases/diseases/en/).

<sup>250</sup> Charlotte Watts, "Neglected tropical diseases: A DFID perspective," *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases* 11, no. 4 (2017): 1.

<sup>251</sup> Kevin D. Frick, Eva V. Basilion, Christy L. Hanson and M. Arantxa Colchero, "Estimating the burden and economic impact of trachomatous visual loss," *Ophthalmic Epidemiology* 10, no. 2 (2003): 128.

<sup>252</sup> Rekol Huy, Ole Wichmann, Mark Beatty, Chantha Ngan, Socheat Duong, Harold S. Margolis and Sirenda Vong, "Cost of dengue and other febrile illnesses to households in rural Cambodia: a prospective community-based case-control study," *BMC Public Health* 9, no. 155 (2009): 4.



intertwined: "Given the strong associations between helminthic and other NTDs and mental, physical, and economic human development, vulnerable and excluded populations, and HDI, in the coming months and years it may become essential to give due consideration to eliminating helminth infections as a means to achieve SDGs".<sup>253</sup> Unfortunately, "The countries with the highest worm indices have an HDI less than 0.400".<sup>254</sup> This means that those countries fare badly in human development, because any country with a rating lower than 0.549 in HDI is considered low.

One success story concerns lymphatic filariasis: after the establishment of a programme by the World Health Organization to defeat lymphatic filariasis in 2000, it is estimated that mass drug administration and other interventions have succeeded in preventing 97 million cases and more than \$100 billion in economic losses.<sup>255</sup> The total investments necessary to wipe out neglected tropical diseases is estimated to be US\$34 billion between 2015-2030.<sup>256</sup> The required amount is much less than the global annual military spending, and they can be addressed by a very tiny portion of illicit financial flows.

Neglected tropical diseases do not kill most people they infect, but rather impede their economic potential and thus exacerbate extreme poverty. There is strong evidence that there is a

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<sup>253</sup> Peter J. Hotez and Jennifer R. Herricks, "Helminth Elimination in the Pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals: A 'Worm Index' for Human Development," *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases* 9, no. 4 (2015): 4.

<sup>254</sup> Hotez and Herricks, 2.

<sup>255</sup> World Health Organization, *The neglected tropical diseases: a rags-to-riches story* (World Health Organization, 2017), 79.

<sup>256</sup> World Health Organization, *Investing to overcome the global impact of neglected tropical diseases: third WHO report on neglected diseases 2015* (World Health Organization, 2015), xii.

vicious cycle of being among the extremely poor and catching neglected tropical diseases.<sup>257</sup> In other words, neglected tropical diseases emerge due to poverty which obstructs access to health services and proper infrastructure. However, there is a loop here: while neglected tropical diseases almost entirely exist in low-income countries because of extreme poverty, they also cause extreme poverty by considerably reducing economic productivity and hence future earnings. Getting rid of neglected tropical diseases is indispensable to the alleviation of extreme poverty.

#### 4.3.8 Overview of the empirical research on extreme poverty

Research suggests that there are different causes of extreme poverty which has sprung from various social conditions and historical inequalities. What is called the systemic causes of extreme poverty (illicit financial flows, foreign debt, war and military spending, inheritance laws, and colonialism) seem to be much more serious than the symptoms of extreme poverty (malaria and neglected tropical diseases).

Why are they more "serious"? The reasons for this are twofold. The first is that the total harm that has been historically and currently brought about by systemic causes far surpass the total harm brought about by the symptoms of extreme poverty. For instance, foreign debt prevents necessary investments to healthcare, education, government agencies, welfare funds and

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<sup>257</sup> Mathieu Bangert, David H. Molyneux, Steve W. Lindsay, Christopher Fitzpatrick and Dirk Engels, "The cross-cutting contribution of the end of neglected tropical diseases to the sustainable development goals," *Infectious Diseases of Poverty* 6, no. 73 (2017): 15-16.

savings for the extremely poor. War makes low-income countries even poorer. Inheritance laws based on kinship prevents trillions to be distributed fairly among the extremely poor, and leads to the monopolisation of resources. Colonialism has killed millions, and its after-effects on the political stage are prevalent. This means that hundreds of millions of people were, are and will be deprived of basic infrastructure investments which would benefit them immensely. Millions of them have suffered from and will suffer from premature death. While malaria and neglected tropical diseases as the symptoms of extreme poverty have also very negative consequences on the extremely poor, the physical, economic and the social harms brought about by the systemic causes of extreme poverty are cumulatively greater than the physical, economic and the social harms brought about by symptoms of extreme poverty. Such harms arising from the lack of attention to systemic causes of extreme poverty inevitably lead to the advancement of the symptoms of extreme poverty—for instance, if low-income countries have to pay their foreign debt with high interest rates, then they have fewer resources to combat malaria and neglected tropical diseases.

Relatedly, the second is that if we can successfully tackle systemic causes of extreme poverty, we can also successfully prevent the symptoms of extreme poverty. For instance, as explained above, trillions are lost because of illicit financial flows. If only a tiny portion of that loss had been prevented through systemic change and used to address the symptoms of extreme poverty, then malaria could have easily been eradicated (as referred before, it is estimated that \$101.8 billion is needed over 15 years to cut malaria 90% globally by 2030, which is far less than the loss created by illicit financial flows).

In the next section, in light of the empirical research presented above, I assess the systemic change objection against effective altruism, which challenges Premise 4.

## 4.4 The systemic change objection

In the previous section of this chapter, I showed that the systemic causes of extreme poverty such as illicit financial flows, foreign debt, war and military spending, inheritance laws, and colonialism put a greater burden on extreme poverty than malaria and neglected tropical diseases. Such a fact signifies that systemic change which aims to eliminate the systemic causes of extreme poverty is of pivotal significance in the struggle against extreme poverty. Due to this reason, we have to take the *systemic change objection* against effective altruism seriously.

In this part, I present the systemic change objection which accuses effective altruism of unjustifiably distracting individuals from systemic change. The systemic change objection leaves us with three alternative propositions concerning how much of their spare resources individuals should allocate to systemic change. Through comparing low-risk actions with high-risk actions, I argue that individuals should neither allocate all of their spare resources to systemic change nor to effective charities. However uncomplicated it appears to be, such a conclusion depends highly on one's moral preferences and set of moral values in general in a world plagued by risk. In the end, I review the lessons which effective altruism could learn and should take from the systemic change objection with respect to Premise 4.

#### 4.4.1 The systemic change objection and its three propositions

Currently, GiveWell does not recommend any organisation aiming to challenge global economic exploitation, corruption or discrimination. Nor does it promote any organisation focusing on the systemic causes of extreme poverty, and the development of grassroots movements. As leading effective altruists predominantly rely on GiveWell's recommendations and primarily stress the benefits of donating to charities that aim to alleviate extreme poverty, and rarely write on structural reforms and institutional improvements, the claim that effective altruism puts donating at the centre stage and lacks sufficient discussion of systemic change is not unwarranted.

Focusing only on donating is not always well-received. The literature is abundant with criticisms against philanthropy in the form of donating where effective altruism is either directly or indirectly criticised. For instance, Paul Gomberg states that "Philanthropic responses *detract* from a revolutionary political response that might end poverty".<sup>258</sup> In other words, philanthropic responses such as calling for donations could be detrimental to the solution of poverty. According to Gomberg,

[I]f the forces creating hunger can be stopped, then to limit ourselves to addressing their effects without addressing these forces themselves is like trying to bail the boat without fixing the leak. The fallacy of

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<sup>258</sup> Paul Gomberg, "The Fallacy Of Philanthropy," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2002): 30.

philanthropy is one reason (among many) for the one-sidedness of philosophical discussion of hunger. Focusing our attention on immediate help, the analogy tends to obscure that the ordinary workings of capitalist markets create and exacerbate poverty. So the fallacy of philanthropy narrows the discourse about hunger. It lets capitalism off the hook.<sup>259</sup>

Gomberg is also concerned that helping others through donations results in embracing the status quo which takes poverty for granted and amplifies "political quietism".<sup>260</sup>

For some, working towards systemic change as opposed to donating to charities is a process which empowers institutions. In that respect, Theodore M. Lechterman argues that offering malaria nets and implementing deworming programs do not address the problems caused by "dysfunctional public health infrastructure" as they "distract from the urgent but thorny process of institution-building".<sup>261</sup> Similarly, while cash transfers offer some improvements for individuals, they "appear to reduce pressure on the state to regulate the economy in ways that serve its least advantaged citizens, to develop its own assistance programs, and to demand sacrifices from local economic elites".<sup>262</sup> The concern is that donating to charities instead of working towards systemic change undermines the capacity of institutions, social services and economic regulation.

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<sup>259</sup> Gomberg, 55.

<sup>260</sup> Gomberg, 64.

<sup>261</sup> Theodore M. Lechterman, "The Effective Altruist's Political Problem", 52.

<sup>262</sup> Lechterman, 93.

Another concern is that donating will frustrate the creation of a global ethic which fosters the collective participation of individuals in the political systems that they are in. For instance, Anthony Langlois states that systemic change is desirable because of its "creation and maintenance of political cultures that prioritise citizen participation in and accountability for the political order of which they are a part".<sup>263</sup> In contrast, the assumption that "monthly bank balance deductions in the direction of voluntary foreign aid donation" could ensure that people are going to construct and believe in a global ethic has no basis.<sup>264</sup> Again, donations are said to have an obstructing effect in the struggle against extreme poverty because of a false belief.

Likewise, Lisa Herzog accuses effective altruism of "focus[ing] on the 'rational choices' of individuals *within* the current system".<sup>265</sup> Saying that effective altruism has an "individualistic bias", Herzog states that effective altruism "doesn't demand *enough*".<sup>266</sup> The concern here is the behaviour of "picking and choosing charities from an armchair" which may result in missing the importance of "creat[ing] institutions and practices in line with our moral values and ideals".<sup>267</sup>

The points made by different philosophers intersect at the claim that systemic change is something which promises immense

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<sup>263</sup> Anthony J. Langlois, "Charity and Justice in Global Poverty Relief," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 4, (2008): 695.

<sup>264</sup> Langlois, 695.

<sup>265</sup> Lisa Herzog, "Can 'effective altruism' really change the world?", *Open Democracy*, February 22, 2016, [opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/can-effective-altruism-really-change-world](https://opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/can-effective-altruism-really-change-world).

<sup>266</sup> Lisa Herzog, "Can 'effective altruism' really change the world?".

<sup>267</sup> Lisa Herzog, "Can 'effective altruism' really change the world?".

social, economic and political utility whereas donating is regarded as something which significantly delays or completely halts systemic change. All of these lead us to the systemic change objection against effective altruism.

*The systemic change objection.* Effective altruism unjustifiably distracts individuals from allocating their spare resources to systemic change.

As the systemic change objection relies on the indispensability of addressing the systemic causes of extreme poverty through systemic change, we can broadly draw three different variants of it, expressed in these propositions:

1. Individuals should allocate *all* of their spare resources to systemic change.
2. Individuals should allocate *most* of their spare resources to systemic change.
3. Individuals should allocate *some* of their spare resources to systemic change.

The first proposition rules out allocating spare resources to causes which are unrelated to systemic change. In that case, we are not permitted to donate to charities which provide people with fortified food, offer energy subsidies in winter, and organise training for employment. Instead, we are asked to allocate all of our spare resources to mobilising, policy-making, changing politics, challenging current laws, and even triggering a revolution. The first proposition reflects Paul Gombert's train of thought as Gombert



believes that not even a tiny portion of spare resources should be used for interventions unrelated to systemic change. Gomberg argues that:

Whatever money we devote to relief of famine or hunger is money that we do not devote to putting an end to the social relations that create hunger; whatever time we spend in activities of famine or hunger relief is time taken away from addressing large scale causes. That is, both projects, relief and prevention, are so huge that in doing more of one we do less of the other. In addressing poverty these are competing ways of using our time, energy, and other resources. So the proposal to do both is not a viable way to defend philanthropist duties of rescue. Only under the most unusual circumstances (where the optimal response to poverty was to give some aid but not to devote all one's efforts to giving aid) would it be the case that the best response would be to balance giving aid with addressing the causes of poverty.<sup>268</sup>

By appealing to the scarcity of resources and opportunity costs of our actions, Gomberg concludes that individuals should allocate all of their spare resources to systemic change unless some unusual circumstances arise.

The second proposition opts for allocating most of our spare resources to addressing the systemic causes of extreme poverty. At the same time, we can support causes which are unrelated to

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<sup>268</sup> Gomberg, "The Fallacy Of Philanthropy," 64.

systemic change as well. Nevertheless, the amount of spare resources allocated to the interventions unrelated to systemic change should not exceed the amount of spare resources allocated to the interventions related to systemic change. For instance, as Elizabeth Ashford argues, "[D]uties to donate to effective aid agencies should be seen as *backup* duties to aid those who have been unjustly deprived of their economic entitlements. Affluent agents are under both primary duties of justice to reform the structures that underpin severe poverty and backup duties to aid those suffering severe poverty".<sup>269</sup> Ashford's view is about the primacy of the obligations, and not necessarily the amount of spending one ought to devote to systemic change. But a hierarchy made between primary duties and backup duties can inform the discussion of how much we should devote to systemic change and charities. If we are close to Ashford's view, then we may be likely to defend devoting more spare resources to systemic change. This train of thought entails that we should use the greater amount of our spare resources to fulfil our primary duties of justice, and the rest should be allocated to donating to fulfil backup duties. The second proposition appeals to those who have strong credence in systemic change and at the same time have a willingness to explore other interventions unrelated to systemic change in alleviating extreme poverty. In that respect, it attracts those who believe that supporting the interventions unrelated to systemic change is compatible with supporting the interventions related to systemic change. Evidently, the second proposition is weaker than the first proposition.

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<sup>269</sup> Elizabeth Ashford, "Severe Poverty as an Unjust Emergency," in *The Ethics of Giving: Philosophers' Perspectives on Philanthropy*, ed. Paul Woodruff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018): 108.

The third proposition permits us to take action which is unrelated to systemic change in alleviating extreme poverty but we are still asked to support systemic change with some of our spare resources. We could allocate most of our spare resources to GiveWell's recommended charities which are thought to be effective, however, allocating all of our spare resources to them is prohibited. The third proposition provides us with a comfort zone but its uncertainty about the ratio of allocation propels us to be careful in our decision-making process.

As I have already stated, the empirical research on the causes of extreme poverty demonstrates that we have to address the systemic causes of extreme poverty if we want to alleviate extreme poverty. Nevertheless, that does not rule out the possibility that there could be cases made *against* allocating *all* our spare resources to systemic change *at the individual level*.<sup>270</sup> In the following, I make a case for not allocating all of our spare resources to systemic change via the comparison of low-risk actions and high-risk actions. I explain what it entails for allocating *most* and *some* of our resources to systemic change. At the end of the chapter, I clarify what the comparison of low-risk actions and high-risk actions means for effective altruism.

## 4.5 Low-risk actions versus high-risk actions

Low-risk actions have a greater chance of success with regards to their intended outcomes, in contrast to high-risk actions which have a lower chance of success with regards to their intended

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<sup>270</sup> The following cases made against allocating our spare resources to systemic change are intended to bind individuals and are not institutions and governments.

outcomes. In the case of extreme poverty, I argue that donating to charities qualifies as a low-risk action and working towards systemic change qualifies as a high-risk action. If that is true, then a case could be made for preferring low-risk action (donating) over high-risk action (working towards systemic change), which unavoidably weakens the systemic change objection.

Why is donating a low-risk action and working towards systemic change a high-risk action? Via donating, individuals target a specific problem such as the lack of food, shelter or access to health and education. Since the problem is usually material deprivation or inability to receive institutional support, donations try to empower people by providing them with what they need. All over the world, charities ensure the distribution of vitamin tablets, the building of houses, increases in access to health services and schooling. If we choose charities which are transparent and are effective, then it is likely that the potential recipients will indeed receive and benefit from donations. Moreover, donors are increasingly able to track and assess the impact of their donations and decide which causes and interventions to support. As there are many charities that regularly publish their budgets and impact reports, individuals can review them and come to a conclusion about their performance. Some charities even keep individuals updated about how donations are transferred, where they are in the transfer chain, and they send information about how their donations have affected the lives of the recipients. If the chosen charity has proven itself, the risk of the resources being misused, lost or stolen is quite low. In that respect, donating to charities, especially time-tested ones, could be deemed as a low-risk action.

This does not mean that donating to charities does not carry risks: the new administration of a highly-respected charity could be corrupt, donations may be seized by outlaws while being transferred, the country where the donations are sent could block them, donations may be misused without the knowledge of donors or the charity, or they may simply not benefit their recipients. A good example of failure comes directly from a programme previously recommended by GiveWell called No Lean Season. No Lean Season, which was run by the charity Evidence Action, targeted the rural poor by fostering labour mobility which increases incomes. They offered travel subsidies to the rural poor to find a job between planting and harvesting periods. No Lean Season was promoted as one of the top programmes in 2017 due to randomised controlled trials done in 2008 and 2014 where it was recognised to be exceptionally cost-effective. One exception was a randomised controlled trial done in 2013 where "the researchers consider the study in that year to have failed, possibly due to political factors in Bangladesh in 2013" in which migration has been adversely affected.<sup>271</sup> Nonetheless, by "weighing the evidence, the cost of the program, and the potential impacts", GiveWell decided to name it as one of the top programmes in November 2017.<sup>272</sup> When the operating scale increased in 2017 and No Lean Season started reaching 158,155 households as opposed to 16,268 households in 2016, a randomised controlled trial whose preliminary results were shared with GiveWell in September 2018 found that No Lean Season

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<sup>271</sup> "Conditional Subsidies for Seasonal Labor Migration in Northern Bangladesh," GiveWell, November 2018, <https://www.givewell.org/international/technical/programs/conditional-subsidies-seasonal-labor-migration-Bangladesh>.

<sup>272</sup> Catherine Hollander, "Update on No Lean Season's Top Charity Status," GiveWell, November 19, 2018, [blog.givewell.org/2018/11/19/update-on-no-lean-seasons-top-charity-status](https://blog.givewell.org/2018/11/19/update-on-no-lean-seasons-top-charity-status).

did not induce migration. Subsequently, GiveWell removed No Lean Season from its recommendations. More importantly, Evidence Action decided to shut down No Lean Season.<sup>273</sup> The decision was taken not only because of this specific failure but also because of the local Bangladeshi organization that Evidence Action contracted to implement the No Lean Season program allegedly tried to bribe an agency. There was no evidence found concerning the latter but investigators from Evidence Action found that its policies and procedures were not followed in one instance. This example shows that charities, even those who are regularly checked, could fail.

Nevertheless, given that charities worldwide successfully improve the lives of hundreds of millions of people each year, various problems potentially affecting charities are not sufficient to make donating to charities a high-risk action. If charities are transparent about their governance and budgets, assessed by independent organisations and present impact reports, then serious problems are not likely to emerge or be prevented in the initial stages. If serious problems emerge, as in the case of No Lean Season, then they can be detected rather quickly. Given that they are continuously being assessed by GiveWell and others, we have more reasons to trust to GiveWell recommended charities and programmes than some other small and local charities. In that respect, donating in general is a low-risk action and in particular donating to effective charities is a low-risk action since they are tested by many researchers, collaborate with time-tested organisations (such as Against Malaria Foundation collaborating with International Red Cross), publish their research materials, and are

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<sup>273</sup> Kanika Bahl, "We're Shutting Down No Lean Season, Our Seasonal Migration Program: Here's Why", Evidence Action, June 6, 2019, <https://www.evidenceaction.org/blog-full/why-we-are-shutting-down-no-lean-season>.

finally checked by GiveWell which openly lists its past mistakes.<sup>274</sup> Moreover, GiveWell has been evaluated internally and externally in the past, which makes GiveWell recommended charities even less of a risk than other charities which are rarely being checked.<sup>275</sup>

As donating to the most effective charities is a low-risk action, why is working towards systemic change a high-risk action?

Since systemic change demands a lot of people focusing on the same goal, lots of resources, and the neutralisation of other parties attempting to prevent systemic change, it is normally a long-term investment. Abolition of slavery in Europe and North America needed almost three centuries to be successful, feminists have been struggling to ensure suffrage and reproductive rights for at least a hundred years, and LGBT+ individuals have been fighting for their recognition for more than fifty years. Many of the successful social movements have experienced setbacks from time to time and they have demanded additional resources to maintain their momentum. With donating we need relatively few people to cooperate, but with systemic change, we need mass cooperation which makes achieving systemic change much more risky.

Even if we gather enough people on our side, manage to garner vast resources and counteract the opponents of systemic change somehow, we may still be required to wait for our policies to be brought to maturity. We may need to wait years to properly understand and adequately review the effects of our decisions, and we may want to alter the policies in the meantime. For instance, even if we force countries to curb carbon emissions with strict laws,

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<sup>274</sup> "Our Mistakes," GiveWell, March 2019, <https://www.givewell.org/about/our-mistakes>.

<sup>275</sup> "Evaluations of GiveWell," GiveWell, November 2019, <https://www.givewell.org/how-we-work/self-evaluation>.

increase workplace democracy in the multinational companies, revolt against a militaristic administration, then it is certain that its effects will not be short-lived. In that respect, we not only require a serious amount of time to initiate and develop systemic change, but also require a serious amount of time to understand its effects which are large-scale. Put simply, working towards systemic change is like a relay race. Some individuals prepare the base for systemic change and others follow the lead of the early adopters. Once the cause gains a critical mass, striking changes unfold in the society. As it is a time-consuming process, individuals in their lifetimes could see the fruits of their efforts but they often do not witness a systemic change from its beginning to its end. Instead, they contribute to some fragment of this prolonged process.

Moreover, pursuing systemic change may come with the risk of turbulence, trauma, disturbance, interruption and unintended and unpredicted trouble. The harms may be justified on utilitarian grounds or counterbalanced one way or another in the end but the costs may still be highly undesirable. For instance, the desire for or the preparation of systemic change may cause a civil war or an economic upheaval. Likewise, systemic change may sometimes undergo a metamorphosis in which there is a subversion of initial goals and intentions. Innocence may not be sustained against the fragility of will: power drunkenness and a counterrevolution could even subvert the promised systemic change. For instance, according to Trotskyites, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was one of them: many people contributed to and died for the promise of increased liberties and equality but the gradual centralisation of power and the cult of personality under Joseph Stalin's administration ended the hopes of systemic change. This is not to



say that we should be discouraged from taking part in social movements which require systemic change: it is just that collective action and political change naturally trigger a conflict between different parties and different positions.

In the circle of those who defend systemic change, there is a relative inattention to the comparison of donating and working towards systemic change with respect to their risks. They rather refer to the requirements of systemic change which cannot be easily satisfied. For instance, Andrew Kuper as a fierce supporter of systemic change acknowledges that "[Systemic change] requires a nuanced awareness that politics is ineradicably about scale and connectedness, and thus the coordinated action of multiple interdependent roles".<sup>276</sup> The view that systemic change is a high-risk action has also been shared by scholars who are sympathetic to the alleviation of poverty through donating and effective altruism. For instance, Brian Berkey states that "Achieving meaningful and positive institutional change is difficult, resource intensive, and requires substantial participation and cooperation among those committed to bringing it about. Proponents of the institutional critique know this, and insist, in no uncertain terms, that we must strive to achieve it nonetheless."<sup>277</sup> In reply to the critics of effective altruism, Jeff McMahan states that

I can, of course, decide to concentrate my individual efforts on changing my state's institutions, or indeed on trying to change global economic institutions,

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<sup>276</sup> Andrew Kuper, "More Than Charity: Cosmopolitan Alternatives to the 'Singer Solution'," *Ethics & International Affairs* 16, no. 2 (2007): 120.

<sup>277</sup> Brian Berkey, "The Institutional Critique of Effective Altruism," *Utilitas* 30, no. 2 (2017): 170.

though the probability of my making a difference to the lives of badly impoverished people may be substantially lower if I adopt this course than if I undertake more direct action, unmediated by the state.<sup>278</sup>

Likewise, in a response to Gomberg, Søren Sofus Wichmann and Thomas Søbirk Petersen, who defend poverty relief, believe that systemic change "is likely to be both lengthy and uncertain".<sup>279</sup> All of these points show that with donating we need relatively few people to cooperate in order for our money to get to the intended recipients, but, with systemic change we need mass cooperation which makes it much less certain.

Even though donating to the most effective charities is a low-risk action and working towards systemic change is a high-risk action, the latter promises to bring about greater utility if it is achieved. This is because the laws, institutions and the global order would be positively changed, the changes would become solidified, and the number of people who would be affected by it is vast. In a similar vein, *stabilised utility* is emphasised to offset the high-risk of working towards systemic change. Thomas Syme argues that even if donations help many of the extremely poor and ameliorate their lives by offering them necessities and more, it does not address the

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<sup>278</sup> Jeff McMahan, "Philosophical Critiques of Effective Altruism," manuscript, [https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:61cb62d7-13d2-49b8-a6c0-a1bf63c2ecda/d\\_o\\_w\\_n\\_l\\_o\\_a\\_d\\_f\\_i\\_l\\_e?file\\_format=pdf&safe\\_filename=Jeff%2BMcMahan%252C%2BPhilosophical%2Bcritiques%2Bof%2Beffective%2Baltruism.pdf&type\\_of\\_work=Journal+article](https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:61cb62d7-13d2-49b8-a6c0-a1bf63c2ecda/d_o_w_n_l_o_a_d_f_i_l_e?file_format=pdf&safe_filename=Jeff%2BMcMahan%252C%2BPhilosophical%2Bcritiques%2Bof%2Beffective%2Baltruism.pdf&type_of_work=Journal+article).

<sup>279</sup> Søren Sofus Wichmann and Thomas Søbirk Petersen, "Poverty relief: philanthropy versus changing the system: a critical discussion of some objections to the 'Singer Solution'," *Journal of Global Ethics* 9, no. 1 (2013): 7.

global complications which keep extreme poverty alive, and, without systemic change, poverty will reproduce itself over and over.<sup>280</sup> Perhaps additional donations would be required to eradicate extreme poverty but systemic change "can be stable over decades or centuries".<sup>281</sup> In that case, systemic change as opposed to donating would be preferred because of its efficiency, or in other words, routineness and easiness.<sup>282</sup>

However, before we praise systemic change because of its capacity to produce stabilised utility and choose to allocate all of our spare resources to it, even though we believe that it has a relatively low chance of success, we should bear in mind the lesson of Pascal's mugging.<sup>283</sup> Pascal's mugging is a thought experiment where Blaise Pascal encounters a mugger who is unarmed. The mugger presents a deal: if the philosopher gives the mugger the wallet, the mugger will return twice the money. Pascal does not accept it because it is not clear whether Pascal can trust the mugger to bring back double the money. The mugger repeatedly increases the amount promised to bring back, and states that there should be a point where it gradually becomes rational to accept the huge expected utility of the deal, despite the extremely low chance that Pascal will see a penny. The mugger promises Pascal 1,000 quadrillion happy days of life and Pascal concedes by giving the wallet. Despite Pascal's doubts, the amount of expected utility seems to trump them. The story represents the fallacious reasoning

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<sup>280</sup> Timothy Syme, "Charity vs. Revolution: Effective Altruism and the Systemic Change Objection," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 22 (2019): 96.

<sup>281</sup> Syme, 96.

<sup>282</sup> Syme, 96.

<sup>283</sup> Nick Bostrom, "Pascal's mugging," *Analysis* 69, no. 3, (2009): 443-445.

of expected utility maximisation, which requires us to pursue vast utilities with tiny probabilities. In the case of systemic change, a similar narrative can be found in some Marxist beliefs: for instance, there is a belief that through a global proletarian revolution not only economic exploitation but also gender and race inequality would cease to exist in the world. Even if the promises might come into being one day in the future, neither the promise of these vast utilities nor the promise of stabilised utility could mask the fact that working towards systemic change is a high-risk action. Perhaps the most seductive aspect of working towards systemic change in contrast to donating is the excitement it stimulates because of its greater utility, especially among those who hope for a radical and permanent change in the global structure.

Now, I present four cases through which we can compare choosing to donate and choosing to allocate our spare resources to systemic change. While these cases are hypothetical, they should illustrate the trade-off between effective charities and systemic change. In these cases, we will see that donating to charities represents low-risk low-reward scenarios, and allocating spare resources to systemic change represents high-risk high-reward scenarios. Hence, the question we will ask is whether we should prefer low-risk low-reward scenarios or high-risk high-reward scenarios.

*First Case.* Suppose that I have £100 to distribute. I have visited some remote villages where the lack of hygiene materials is an immense problem for the welfare of current and future generations. I am very much affected by the scenes and become sympathetic

to a charity which distributes hygiene materials to those in need. I am also sympathetic to an organisation which supports political candidates who are promising to back policies which will ensure a fairer distribution of resources, including increasing hygiene material distribution.

I review the accomplishments of the charity which I deem to be successful and trustworthy. The impact report states that for each £10 donated, 1 person gets access to the hygiene materials they need for a year. Let me translate it to 1 Utility (1 U). It means that by donating £100, I could cover the hygiene materials for 10 people for a year and create 10 U. But there can be organisational and social problems along the way that might impede the transfer chain and the welfare gain. Assume that each donation has a 90% chance of success. The *expected utility* of the donation becomes 9 EU.<sup>284</sup>

I also review the accomplishments of an organisation that builds the infrastructure of systemic change. They invest their resources to mass mobilisation, build networks between people, organisations and policy-makers to bring about changes in laws which would guarantee health improvements. According to the impact predictions, their new project to support political candidates who promise to improve the hygiene conditions in a run-down village will affect the entire community of 90 people if the political candidates manage to get elected. I notice that the chance of political candidates that they support is not low but they are likely to face various bureaucratic barriers. Many of the past projects of the

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<sup>284</sup>  $(10) \times (90/100)$ .

organisation were also hindered in similar ways and there have been crucial mishaps along the way. I calculate that the success chance of the organisation in this particular project is 10%. Thus, the expected utility is equal to 9 EU.<sup>285</sup>

*Second Case.* Suppose that everything is the same as in *First Case*, except the number of people affected if the political organisation is successful. Let me assume that 900 people are positively affected once the policy change happens. It means that the expected utility of the organisation is 90 EU against the expected utility of charity which is 9 EU.<sup>286</sup>

	Charity			Systemic Change		
	<i>People</i>	<i>Success Chance</i>	<i>EU</i>	<i>People</i>	<i>Success Chance</i>	<i>EU</i>
<b>First Case</b>	10	90%	9 EU	90	10%	9 EU
<b>Second Case</b>	10	90%	9 EU	900	10%	90 EU

Inevitably, how we decide between donating to charity and working towards systemic change boils down to the deeper issue of risk-keenness and risk-averseness. For instance, in *First Case*, expected utility is the same, but risk-keen individuals would be likely to choose systemic change over charity because the number of people who could potentially be affected is 9 times larger. Risk-

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<sup>285</sup>  $(90) \times (10/100)$ .

<sup>286</sup>  $(900) \times (10/100)$ .

averse individuals would opt for charity. Moreover in *Second Case*, risk-keen individuals would be likely to opt for systemic change because there is a 10-fold difference in expected utility. Risk-averse individuals would be likely to do the opposite. As far as systemic change is concerned in *First Case* and *Second Case*, the term itself refers to some modest change in a narrow context like a local institutional improvement. With the number of people affected and the vastness of the impact, the discussion regarding extreme poverty with respect to donating and working towards systemic change is more likely to be associated with *Third Case* and *Fourth Case* rather than *First Case* and *Second Case*.

*Third Case.* Suppose that I am a respected public intellectual who has a massive power to change the direction of resources. I could have an impact on the ordinary folk, politicians, and the rich. By publicly supporting a cause, I can initiate a chain to raise £1 billion for that cause. I face the dilemma: I either publicly support the vaccination of 100 million people or I publicly support an unarmed rebel group with the ideals of equality and freedom to overthrow an oppressive government under which 900 million people are living.

I examine the works of the charity responsible for vaccination. The charity works globally under the close supervision of many states and other international organisations, and has successfully vaccinated hundreds of millions of people in the past decades. I calculate that it has 90% of being successful in vaccinating 100

million people, and the expected utility is 90 million utility (90 MEU).<sup>287</sup>

I also inspect the activities, values, and the links of the unarmed rebel group. I am sympathetic to it as it does not aim to use any violence but it is planning to trigger peaceful mass demonstrations to force the government to step down. 900 million people are living under the oppressive government, and overthrowing it means that 900 million people are going to receive a higher quality of health and education services, and they are going to have more political rights and personal liberties. After doing the calculation, I discern that the rebel group has a 10% chance of being successful which again creates 90 MEU.<sup>288</sup> In this case, overthrowing the oppressive government enables an improvement in the lives of 900 million people equal to vaccination of 100 million people because the expected utility between two is equal.<sup>289</sup>

*Fourth Case.* Suppose that everything is the same as in the *Third Case* but the number of people being affected by the systemic change that the unarmed rebel group affects is different. If the oppressive government is overthrown, it will trigger a chain of peaceful mass demonstrations in other regions as well, which would result in 9 billion people having drastic improvements to their lives. It provides 900 MU against

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<sup>287</sup>  $(100,000,000) \times (90/100)$ .

<sup>288</sup>  $(900,000,000) \times (10/100)$ .

<sup>289</sup> For the sake of the argument, suppose that the vaccine creates the same benefit per person as being freed from oppression.



90 MU which can be created by vaccinating 100 million people.<sup>290</sup>

	Charity			Systemic Change		
	<i>People</i>	<i>Success Chance</i>	<i>EU</i>	<i>People</i>	<i>Success Chance</i>	<i>EU</i>
<b>Third Case</b>	100M	90%	90 MEU	900M	10%	90 MEU
<b>Fourth Case</b>	100M	90%	90 MEU	9B	10%	900 MEU

As opposed to *First Case* and *Second Case*, the systemic change referred to in *Third Case* and in *Fourth Case* are analogous to the systemic change discussed in relation to effective altruism. Whereas *First Case* and *Second Case* are significant to understand risk-keenness and risk-averseness, *Third Case* and *Fourth Case* highlight the variable of *scale* in choosing between charity and systemic change. As the number of people I could affect becomes greater, risk-keenness appears to become less and less plausible because the expected loss would be immense. For instance, it is somewhat bewildering and daring to choose systemic change over charity in *Third Case*, even though it is much easier to choose systemic change over charity in *First Case* in which the chance of systemic change being successful is the same in both cases, but the number of people affected and expected utility are incredibly different. After all, even though the risk of failure is the same, failing 90 people in *First Case* through a failed investment in systemic change (where we could otherwise help 10 people with 90% of

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<sup>290</sup>  $(9,000,000,000) \times (10/100)$ .

certainty) and failing 9 billion people in *Third Case* through systemic change (where we could otherwise have helped 100 million people with 90% certainty) result in outstandingly different potentials missed. In *First Case*, our failure to help 90 people because of our risk-keenness (accepting a 10% chance of success) means that we have missed the opportunity to help 10 people with 90% certainty. Some may understandably choose it. But in *Third Case*, our failure to help 900 million people because of our risk-keenness (accepting 10% chance of success) signifies that we have missed the opportunity to help 100 million people with 90% certainty. Choosing systemic change over charity in *Third Case* is less convincing than choosing systemic change over charity in *First Case*. There is something similar at work in the comparison of *Second Case* and *Fourth Case*: those who are risk-keen by choosing to allocate their spare resources to systemic change in *Second Case* would probably be less comfortable to allocate their spare resources to systemic change in *Fourth Case*.

Arguably, in the wake of enormous risks and immense yet doubtful promises, it seems understandable to opt for allocating spare resources to relatively modest aims with very high success chances. In fact, this is what effective altruists do: they focus on donating to charities which have modest aims relative to the promises of systemic change. This is also what Pascal's mugging tells us: being attracted to vast utilities with tiny probabilities could deceive us badly. In Pascal's mugging, the mugger is evil, but in the case of systemic change, deception does not necessarily find its origins in evil. Many proponents of systemic change act in good faith to change the world radically. But a global reform or revolution requires enormous resources and cooperation that it produces a

great risk of failure. To avoid it, effective altruists avoid opting for systemic change, and they instead accept modest aims. That seems to some degree reasonable.

It could be concluded that we should not allocate all of our spare resources to systemic change because of its high-risk nature. But if we should not allocate all of our spare resources to systemic change because of its high-risk nature, then should we allocate all of our spare resources to donating? Possibly, *the collective obligations problem* rules it out. As discussed by Allan F. Gibbard and Donald Regan, and adapted to effective altruism by Alexander Dietz, the collective obligations problem emerges where *maximising individual utility* does not always correspond to *maximising overall utility*.<sup>291</sup>

Dietz explains the collective obligations problem via a thought experiment:

For each of us who donates to GiveDirectly, one person will ultimately be able to rise out of poverty. On the other hand, if we both donate to the advocacy group, the group will muster enough support to remove the immigration restrictions, which will have the effect of lifting millions of people out of poverty. But if only one of us donates to the advocacy group, this donation will accomplish nothing, and someone will remain in poverty whom we could otherwise have benefited. In this case, if we both donate to GiveDirectly, each of us will do the most good we can, given what the other is doing. Thus, we will succeed at

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<sup>291</sup> Alexander Dietz, "Effective Altruism and Collective Obligations," *Utilitas* 31, no. 1 (2009): 109.

doing what EA tells us to do. But again, we will together have failed to make the outcome as good as it could have been if we had acted differently.<sup>292</sup>

There are three scenarios at work in Dietz's thought experiment. The first scenario is where each of the two people donating to GiveDirectly maximises individual utility but falls short of maximising overall utility. The reason why it falls short of maximising overall utility is the existence of an alternative scenario, that is, the second scenario where each of the two people allocates their spare resources to an advocacy group which maximises overall utility. In other words, by donating to GiveDirectly, "[W]e will be making things less good than we could have, since we could have made the outcome better if we had both [allocated our spare resources to the advocacy group]".<sup>293</sup> The third scenario is where only one of the two people allocating their spare resources to the advocacy group. Those resources happen to be insufficient both for helping a person in poverty and for initiating systemic change. Hence, this scenario neither maximises individual utility nor overall utility. The following table summarises the scenarios.<sup>294</sup>

		You	
		<i>do A</i>	<i>do B</i>
I	<i>do A</i>	Second-best	Bad
	<i>do B</i>	Bad	Best

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<sup>292</sup> Dietz, 110.

<sup>293</sup> Dietz, 109.

<sup>294</sup> Dietz, 109.

Dietz's thought experiment is useful in helping us to understand why we should not prefer donating all of our spare resources to the most effective charities in the wake of our decision to not allocate all of our spare resources to systemic change. In the previous part, we have recognised that the systemic causes of extreme poverty put enormous burdens on the lives of the extremely poor and interventions through systemic change could produce vast benefits for them. In that respect, if collectively allocating our resources to systemic change produces a greater overall utility compared to collectively donating to the effective charities, then should we not try to increase the success chance of systemic change so that our collective efforts would lead to producing more utility? If that is true, perhaps merely taking into account the *current* low success chance of systemic change is not reasonable, and we should organise ourselves to increase its success chance to the point where its success chance becomes greater than donating. After all, by increasing our efforts for systemic change, it may be viable to increase its success chance and also reach the greater expected utility it promises. Indubitably, there is a serious uncertainty whether increasing the number of people allocating their spare resources to systemic change increases its success chance but it should not be something next to impossible given the promising records of social movements.

This point discourages us from allocating *all* of our spare resources to donating. But, it is not strong enough to convince us to allocate *all* of our resources to systemic change either, since doing that still carries a much greater risk of failure as opposed to donating. While the collective obligations problem as presented by

Dietz may have a point in supporting systemic change, it remains hypothetical when the relative risks of donating and systemic change are not factored in. However, the collective obligations problem applied to a *chaotic* world -our world- should encourage us to divide our spare resources between effective charities and systemic change.

Despite the danger of failing to maximise overall utility when all parties donate all of their spare resources to effective charities, the question of why effective altruists are relatively satisfied with GiveWell's recommendations and do not attempt to assess systemic change is a curious one. After all, effective altruism is a movement which assesses many different causes and problems including those which are highly controversial, such as existential risk from artificial intelligence. Given that advocating systemic change is among the most known and most popular approaches in alleviating extreme poverty, how come effective altruism misses assessing systemic change?

One response may be that some effective altruists are concerned about the political orientation of systemic change. Systemic change evokes the policies of the left, especially the radical left, and those who are uncomfortable with them may have a resistance to assessing systemic change in alleviating extreme poverty. From this perspective, assessing systemic change is identical with politicising or unnecessarily politicising effective altruism. We can call it the *image problem of systemic change*. If we partly credit the image problem of systemic change to the failure of effective altruism to pay enough attention to systemic change, then perhaps there is an inclination to avoid carrying out research on systemic change.

The inclination to avoid carrying out research on systemic change could be intentional or unintentional, but it has to be resisted. Regardless of what the political orientation of systemic change is deemed to be, effective altruism has to conduct research to find the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty. If systemic change arises to be one of the eligible cause areas to be scrutinised, then effective altruism should be neutral to the deemed political orientation of systemic change, provided that effective altruism aims to be consistent with its principles. In that manner, being inclined to avoid carrying out research on systemic change in alleviating extreme poverty means that we are putting a cause off the table for no meaningful reason. It goes counter to the quest of effective altruists to find ways to do the most good they can—it violates one of the core commitments of effective altruism, namely, cause neutrality. Moreover, the concern related to the political orientation of systemic change fails to realise that solely focusing on donating to effective charities is also a political choice. Having a charity-oriented mind does not render one politically neutral. It becomes political not only by preferring one solution over another but also by excluding other political choices such as the struggle against exploitation, corruption, colonialism and capitalism. Ultimately, it is as political as other options since it is a decision made across other options which all have political implications, and one is not necessarily more political than others.

One way to by-pass or at least weaken the image problem of systemic change could be to translate the perceived sharp political aspects of systemic change into philosophical doctrines. This could be read along the lines of Rubenstein. In criticising effective altruism in some respects but at the same time showing that effective

altruism could overcome the anti-political sensibility that it has been accused of, Rubenstein argues that "explicitly incorporat[ing] other values in addition to increasing individual welfare, such as justice, fairness, and inclusion" would be beneficial.<sup>295</sup> After all, effective altruism would not support assessing systemic change because it is political, but because it would have a good chance in alleviating extreme poverty. In that respect, we have to resist the image problem of systemic change to prevent individuals from being inclined to avoid conducting research on systemic change.

Another explanation as to why effective altruism does not focus on systemic change may be that effective altruism is still in its infancy phase in which a diverse enough discussion of conflicting approaches has not yet taken place. As a movement which was scarcely known a decade ago, effective altruism has perhaps not reached the level where a sufficient number of opposing approaches have been suggested and thoroughly discussed for alleviating extreme poverty. If that is the case, rather than accusing effective altruism of immaturity and halt a possible exchange of views, we could encourage it to pay more attention to systemic change so that there could be more people willing to conduct research on systemic change and more research funding allocated for it.

So far, I have defended the idea that the best thing to do is neither allocating all of our spare resources to effective charities nor allocating them all to systemic change: it is dividing our spare resources between them. There are several advantages of dividing our spare resources between effective charities and systemic change.

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<sup>295</sup> Jennifer Rubenstein, "The Lessons of Effective Altruism", 519.



One advantage of dividing our spare resources between effective charities and systemic change is keeping *option value* intact. Briefly, option value can be defined as "'The value something has because it provides an alternative way of promoting something else that has instrumental and/or end value.'"<sup>296</sup> In some cases where reversibility and irreversibility of a decision is a concern, it "represents the flexibility to adapt later decisions to the received information."<sup>297</sup> Option value revolves around our willingness to pay for preserving an option. For instance, even though people do not use conservation areas, their money is channelled into them by governments due to their actual and prospective benefits in biological diversity, the overall health of the society, and slowing down climate change.

In the context of extreme poverty, option value represents the opportunities not coming from the option which we deem the best but from the options which we deem relatively subordinate but still promising. If we allocate all of our spare resources to effective charities, we may miss supporting a new and a fairer economic model which has been gradually made available by current eco-technological advancements in due course. But if we had allocated at least some of our resources to that, then we would have supported the development process of it which could bring about the utility it promised earlier. Likewise, if we choose to allocate all of our spare resources to systemic change, then we may miss making the eradication process of preventable diseases by effective

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<sup>296</sup> Erik Persson, "Option Value, Substitutable Species, and Ecosystem Services," *Environmental Ethics* 38, no. 2 (2016): 165-181.

<sup>297</sup> Noël Pauwels, Bartel van de Walle, Frank Hardeman and Karel Soudan, "The Implications of Irreversibility in Emergency Response Decisions," *Theory and Decision* 49 (2000): 26.

charities sustainable. Allocating at least some of our resources to effective charities could contribute to render that work uninterrupted. Given that what we call "the best estimate" today to alleviate extreme poverty could change tomorrow in the face of a chaotic world, keeping option value intact leads us to diversify our allocation of resources, that is, to abstain from allocating all of our resources to our best estimate. Solely relying on our best estimate (may it be allocating all of our spare resources to effective charities or systemic change) obstructs the realisation of benefits arising from the option value which we could have invested in. Moreover, as we are in the era of rapid social changes including political and institutional shifts, keeping option value intact seems even more significant.

Similar points on option value are made by Holden Karnofsky, a member of the Board of Managers at the Open Philanthropy Project, and a co-founder and Vice Chair of GiveWell, who supports *worldview diversification*. According to worldview diversification, we are "putting significant resources behind *each* worldview that we find highly plausible".<sup>298</sup> This rules out allocating all of our spare resources to one cause or a very narrow policy within a cause area. One of the arguments for worldview diversification that Karnofsky puts forth is option value:

Over time, we expect that our thinking on which worldviews are most appealing will evolve. For example, I recently discussed three key issues I've changed my mind about over the last several years,

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<sup>298</sup> Holden Karnofsky, "Worldview Diversification," last modified December 13, 2016, <https://www.openphilanthropy.org/blog/worldview-diversification>.

with major implications for how promising I find different causes. It's very possible that ten years from now, some particular worldview (and its associated causes) will look much stronger to us than the others - and that it won't match our current best guess. If this happens, we'll be glad to have invested in years of capacity building so we can quickly and significantly ramp up our support.

Another long-term benefit is that we can be useful to donors with diverse worldviews. If we worked exclusively in causes matching our "best guess" worldview, we'd primarily be useful to donors with the same best guess; if we do work corresponding to all of the worldviews we find highly compelling, we'll be useful to any donor whose values and approach are broadly similar to ours. That's a big difference: I believe there are many people with fundamentally similar values to ours, but different best guesses on some highly uncertain but fundamental questions - for example, how to value reducing global catastrophic risks vs. accelerating scientific research vs. improving policy.<sup>299</sup>

If we keep the option value intact, then our marginal impact on a problem like extreme poverty could be higher than otherwise would be the case. Suppose that we think that some form of systemic change is valuable to allocate some of our spare

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<sup>299</sup> Holden Karnofsky, "Worldview Diversification".

resources, like pushing the government to limit its borrowing. If we could succeed to limit its borrowing, there would be a larger pool of spare resources for interventions against extreme poverty. We think that it would considerably increase the welfare of the extremely poor in that country. It is currently not the best option because of some political uncertainty, but it is still promising. So we continue to support the relevant organisation. In a year or two, the political uncertainty has resolved and it is much easier to affect the decision-making process. Sustaining the momentum to limit borrowing is *now* our best option to alleviate extreme poverty, surpassing its alternatives. If we had not supported the relevant organisation and thus had not preserved option value, the organisation would not have lived up to this date or its capacity would have been much weaker—and our marginal impact would have been much lower than it is now, forcing us to allocate most of our spare resources to our second-best estimate.

We are all vulnerable in making mistakes when striving to find the best response against extreme poverty: individuals who choose to donate to charity and not work towards systemic change could be misguided even though they calculate, analyse and compare the options to the best of their ability. Obsessing with our best estimate may deceive us as the situation regarding extreme poverty is complex. It seems that preserving option value and thus aiming for capacity building *both* for effective charities and systemic change has its advantages of lessening the possible impediments of risk and uncertainty, decreasing the likelihood of wrong best guesses which waste resources, and being flexible enough to attract people with different values. Effective altruists could benefit from the reasoning process behind preserving the option value.

Another advantage of dividing our spare resources between effective charities and systemic change is being able to alter our decisions in response to the changes in *diminishing marginal returns*. Suppose that we have decided to allocate most of our spare resources to a form of systemic change, namely, the fight against corruption in a country which accommodates a significant number of the extremely poor. Thanks to the advocacy organisations, lobbying, and the pressure from the bottom, the country becomes more and more democratic and transparent. As a result, the corruption rate dramatically dwindles to the point where the positive effect of allocating additional resources to fight corruption on the welfare of the extremely poor is relatively small as opposed to the positive effect stemming from the interventions of effective charities. In that case, we may want to decrease our spare resources allocated to the fight against corruption and allocate most of them to the charity interventions which bring about more welfare. We may still want to keep some of our spare resources allocated to the fight against corruption to prevent corruption to be prevalent again.

Effective altruists are eager to refer to diminishing marginal returns and use it as a basis for which causes we should allocate our resources to. Understanding diminishing marginal returns is also important to constantly check whether a charity, intervention or organisation is still cost-effective.

I understand that 15 or 20 years ago, mass vaccinations were extremely cost-effective and probably the best thing to be doing. Then the Gates Foundation has come in and funded a lot of the mass vaccination interventions. Now, the most cost-effective

intervention is less cost-effective than mass vaccinations [than it was in 15 or 20 years ago]. That is great because we have taken those low hanging fruit.<sup>300</sup>

Owen Cotton-Barratt, who worked as a Director of Research at the Centre for Effective Altruism, draws attention to the difference in cost-effectiveness of mass vaccination. Since the cost-effectiveness has changed, the marginal impact of one's spare resources has also changed. The presence of diminishing marginal returns makes a case for being prepared to rationally switch interventions, and it also discourages us to be fixated on any of the interventions against extreme poverty since it signifies the ever-changing marginal impact of additional resources. We always have to consider the change, uncertainty and the possible outcomes of interventions.

Moreover, Karnofsky emphasises the relationship between diminishing marginal returns and expected utility:

When accounting for strong uncertainty and diminishing marginal returns, worldview diversification can maximize expected value even when one worldview looks 'better' than the others in expectation. One way of putting this is that if we were choosing between 10 worldviews, and one were 5x as good as the other nine, investing all our resources in that one would - at the relevant margin, due to the 'diminishing

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<sup>300</sup> Owen Cotton-Barratt, "Prospecting for Gold," in *Effective Altruism Handbook: 2nd Edition* (The Centre for Effective Altruism, 2016), 26.

returns' point - be worse than spreading across the ten.<sup>301</sup>

This is another strong point for recognising the diminishing marginal returns and not allocating all of our spare resources solely to one side. Even if we had thought there is some best option to alleviate extreme poverty, which begs for enormous resources, dividing our resources between it and relatively subordinate options may bring about a greater expected utility. Consider a case where allocating £A of our resources to mass vaccination is 3-fold effective in combatting extreme poverty than allocating our resources to its alternatives. Suppose that allocating £A only to mass vaccination brings about 3X good, only to election reform brings about X good, only to education reform brings about X good, only to land reform brings about X good, and only to bureaucracy reform brings about X good. Further suppose that we are very close to the point of diminishing marginal returns and allocating £5A would bring about only 2-fold as much good if we had chosen to allocate all of our resources to mass vaccination. This means that allocating our £5A to only mass vaccination would bring about 6X ( $3X \times 2$ ), whereas allocating our £5A to all causes equally would bring about 7X ( $3X + X + X + X + X$ ). Dividing our resources between causes brings about more expected utility, and thus becomes ~14% ( $1 - [6X/7X]$ ) more effective.

Another point about diminishing marginal returns is that it may be harder to calculate the point of diminishing marginal returns of systemic change as opposed to calculating the point of diminishing marginal returns of charities. This is again because of

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<sup>301</sup> Holden Karnofsky, "Worldview Diversification".

uncertainty, the hardship of tracking the long-term effects of systemic change, and its complexity. Effective altruists may have a greater uncertainty about the size of their marginal impact when they allocate their spare resources to systemic change in contrast to donating. Since they could understand the effects of their donations more easily and since there is a lower risk of things going bad, they could also calculate their marginal impact more easily. For instance, in evaluating charities, GiveWell always include "the room for more funding" as a criterion: "If a charity's core program is outstanding, is this enough reason to donate to it? We say no. There is still the question: how will the charity's activities be influenced by *additional* donations?"<sup>302</sup> By calculating how the charity's activities are going to be influenced by additional donations, one could also calculate one's influence by donating, or, in other words, one's marginal impact. In contrast, it is rather difficult to calculate it in the case where one allocates spare resources to systemic change. There could also be a metric to calculate it for a given form of systemic change, so that it should not be impossible, but it should be way harder than calculating it for effective charities. Perhaps this is an additional task for the proponents of systemic change by which we could more comfortably compare donating with working towards systemic change. Nevertheless, recognising diminishing marginal returns provide us with a tool to be responsive—either by giving more to effective charities or by giving more to systemic change, depending on the points of diminishing marginal returns.

Some may still insist on allocating all of our resources to the cost-effective option which still has a long way to go before it hits

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<sup>302</sup> "Room for More Funding," GiveWell, <https://www.givewell.org/how-we-work/criteria/room-for-more-funding>.



the diminishing marginal returns as opposed to other options. But this disregards the importance of uncertainty and option value. Furthermore, whenever there are multiple cost-effective options which are comparable in terms of their point of diminishing marginal returns, allocating all of our spare resources is not likely to be the best option because of the above-mentioned concerns and examples.

## 4.6 Conclusion

There are three concluding points.

The first concluding point is that effective altruists can justifiably not allocate all of their spare resources to systemic change because their decision to opt for low-risk action, namely, donating to the most effective charities is understandable. Put differently, the case for risk-averseness in the case of choosing between allocating spare resources to effective charities and allocating spare resources to systemic change is to some degree compelling. Nevertheless, as shown, even an effective charity, Evidence Action, could fail and close one of its programmes which was once considered to be effective. Moreover, as a result of the spare resources allocated to systemic change, there are historical victories of social movements which turn the system upside down for good. In that respect, allocating all of our spare resources to effective charities could be suboptimal as well.

The second concluding point is that effective altruism as a *movement* has to be very cautious about universally promoting charity over systemic change. As effective altruism tries to find the effective options to do the most good, promoting or hinting at

donating as the blanket solution would render it dangerously conservative. In that respect, effective altruism should be *open to assessing* systemic change, and at the same time *demonstrate that it is open to assessing* systemic change.

The third concluding point is that the decision of how much to allocate our spare resources to systemic change is still relevant. Since I have rejected the first proposition that individuals should allocate all of their spare resources to systemic change and also the contrary thought that individuals should donate all of their spare resources to effective charities, I have to choose either the second or the third proposition. The second proposition urges us to allocate most of our resources to systemic change and the third proposition urges us to allocate some of our resources to systemic change. Admittedly, the answer is not predetermined. The calculation of risks, the methodology of the calculation of risks, the credence in systemic change, the credence in a specific intervention leading to systemic change, the level of trust we have in the organisations advocating systemic change are all subject to discussion. They cannot be known once and for all either, as they may undergo fundamental changes over time. Our best shot is to consider all of the variables in a given context and decide to embrace the second or the third proposition, and reconsider our decision whenever necessary.

In the next chapter, I will assess the systemic change objection with regards to future people, especially the future extremely poor.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Systemic Change Objection: The Future Extremely Poor and the Non-Identity Problem**

#### *Premise 4*

*Donating to effective charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty.*

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Knowing that systemic change is mostly a long-term endeavour, the majority of agents who will be affected by it are *future people*. There is a growing interest in the questions pertaining to future people such as whether they have moral standing, whether existing people have moral obligations towards them, and whether

the political representation of future people is necessary.<sup>303</sup> However, surprisingly, the moral standing of future people has not received enough attention in discussions concerning systemic change and effective altruism. In fact, we cannot sufficiently assess the systemic change objection against effective altruism without thinking on the question of whether future people have moral standing. For instance, if we think that future people have interests to which we owe care and protection, then we would find effective altruism questionable when it is negligent about systemic change. If we think otherwise, then we may be satisfied with a form of effective altruism which exclusively focuses on existing people through donations to charity.

In assessing the systemic change objection, I focus on a small subset of future people, namely, the *future extremely poor*. As shown in the previous chapter, philosophers who subscribe to the systemic change objection emphasise the corrupt global order whose alteration, reversal or destruction could bring about a greater utility than a "chipping in" approach such as donating—it is mostly on that ground that the systemic change objection has arisen. The utility which would be gained from systemic change is most likely not to be exclusively received by the existing extremely poor. It would be either shared between the existing extremely poor and the future extremely poor or received solely by the future extremely poor. For instance, if we contribute to an institutional change which would require twenty years to put an end to cheap labour exploitation, both

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<sup>303</sup> Especially refer to Tim Mulgan, *Future People: A Moderate Consequentialist Account of Our Obligations to Future Generations* (New York: Clarendon, 2006); Marcus Düwell, Gerhard Bos and Naomi van Steenbergen, eds., *Towards the Ethics of a Green Future: The Theory and Practice of Human Rights for Future People* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Simon Caney, "Justice and Future Generations," *Annual Review of Political Science* 21, no. 1 (2018): 475-493.

some of the existing extremely poor and the future extremely poor would be saved from it. An opposite example can be the case of breaking the oligopolies in the pharmaceutical industry which would require two hundred years. The positive consequences of the defeated oligopolies and the removal of the overly restricting patent rights would not be experienced before the tipping point, that is, two hundred years of accumulated resistance. In that case, the future extremely poor would receive all of the utility. Given what we know of past and present systemic change movements around rights, liberties, peace, distribution of resources and institutional improvements, we could predict that most examples of systemic change will be long-term projects of which future people will be the primary potential beneficiaries. The fact that systemic change is a marathon reveals a surprise element in the systemic change objection: it naturally triggers a discussion regarding the moral standing of the future extremely poor and how their interests should be weighed against the existing extremely poor. What we derive from it can provide us with reasons to support or reject the three propositions of systemic change, and the current position of effective altruism regarding systemic change.

Normally, donations collected by charities are used almost immediately for the existing extremely poor. In that respect, donating improves the lives of the existing extremely poor. Nevertheless, as explained earlier, systemic change is an arduous task and carrying it out is not as easy as donating. It requires harmonious parties, a myriad of resources, and sustained coordination. As the consequences of systemic change also need more time to materialise than donating, they will mostly be experienced by the future extremely poor. Nevertheless, despite having workers,

activists and public figures advocating systemic change, there is no charity which raises resources for the future extremely poor. For many people, if a charity had been raising donations for the future extremely poor, then it would be very controversial. Nevertheless, rather ironically, many do not find allocating spare resources to systemic change odd, even if it is mostly the future extremely poor who will benefit from it. Whereas convincing people to donate to a charity which raises resources for the future extremely poor would strike them as awkward, supporting systemic change through campaigns and revolutions whose maturity will not be witnessed by the existing extremely poor does not strike them as odd.

What does this imply for the systemic change objection? Considering the interests of the future extremely poor, how much should individuals allocate their spare resources to systemic change: *All, most or some*? These are the questions drawn from the three propositions of the systemic change objection.

In the previous chapter, I rejected the first proposition and thus argued that we should not allocate all of our resources to systemic change because it is a high-risk action. I have also excluded the possibility that we should only be focusing on donating to effective charities because the efforts for major social movements which have brought about radical benefits to the world have paid off. I have advocated a position in which individuals should either allocate most or some of their spare resources to systemic change after carefully considering risks. In the following, I defend the same position because the multivariate nature of the negotiation between effective charities and systemic change propels us to avoid any exclusive commitment to allocate all of our resources either to effective charities and systemic change. There are several factors

which help us to understand which division of resources could be the best, including numbers and fairness, and the distribution of utility.

In the following, I start by explaining how I use the terms future people and the future extremely poor. By appealing to the *time-insensitivity of the moral value of a given amount of welfare* and the *rights continuing ad infinitum*, I argue that we have grounds to consider the interests of the future extremely poor as much as the existing extremely poor. Then, I list the above mentioned factors (numbers and fairness, and the distribution of utility) which help us to understand which division of resources could be the best when allocating our spare resources to effective charities and systemic change. These are very complex by nature and committing oneself to allocate all of one's spare resources to merely one option could be morally dangerous, and so I argue that effective altruism should support the second or the third proposition of the systemic change which asks individuals to allocate *most* or *some* of their spare resources to systemic change. After responding to the non-identity problem as a possible objection and showing that the non-identity problem cannot subvert the systemic change objection, I conclude that effective altruism should give more weight to systemic change than it does now.

## 5.2 Future people and the future extremely poor

What we understand from the term *future people* can be ambiguous. Colloquially, we might use it to refer to the existing newborns, existing children and those who will immediately succeed us after our death. Here, I envisage it including anyone who will be

born henceforth.<sup>304</sup> Provided that our civilisation does not suffer from early extinction, I acknowledge that almost all of the future people will exist in the far future rather than in the near future.

What about the *future extremely poor*? Some of the existing people who are not yet among the extremely poor will be driven to extreme poverty due to various adverse conditions. However, most of the future extremely poor have not been born yet. Presumably, there will be millions or billions of future people who will find themselves in extreme poverty over the coming decades, centuries or millennia.

There are two possible future worlds. In the first possible world, we do not work towards systemic change, and hence systemic change does not take place. There will be plenty of future extremely poor. In the second possible world, we work towards systemic change, and hence systemic change takes place. There could still be future extremely poor (if extreme poverty is not completely eliminated) but the number of the future extremely poor would be much lower than in the first world. Systemic change would ensure that there are either no or fewer future extremely poor. Moreover, some of those extremely poor living in the future could be collectively positively affected by the systemic change which has taken place. For instance, thanks to systemic change, they may have better mechanisms to help them to get out of extreme poverty.

Admittedly, considering the interests of the future extremely poor will strike many people as counterintuitive. After all, hundreds of millions of the existing extremely poor suffer from a myriad of negative conditions which lead to exploitation, discrimination and exclusion. In the following, I argue that the interests of the future

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<sup>304</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, I exclude non-human sentient beings.



extremely poor should matter as much as the existing extremely poor. I present two reasons why we should consider the interests of the future extremely poor as much as the existing extremely poor: the first concerns the time-insensitivity of the moral value of a given amount of welfare value of welfare and the second concerns rights continuing ad infinitum.

### 5.2.1 The time-insensitivity of the moral value of a given amount of welfare

The first reason why we should consider the interests of the future extremely poor as much as the existing extremely poor is the time-insensitivity of the moral value of a given amount of welfare.

There are two interconnected issues here: the first is the moral value of a given amount of welfare and the second is the time-insensitivity of it. Welfare has moral value because the components of it such as happiness, pleasure, pain, suffering have a direct effect on one's experiences. One cannot escape from these experiences. They inextricably control one's life and one's actions hugely depend on them. All else being equal, the moral value of a given amount of welfare should be regarded as the same across time. In other words, whenever the amount of welfare is the same, the moral value of that amount of welfare should also be the same regardless of when one is living. If this is the case, then we can call the moral value of a given amount of welfare *time-insensitive*.

Accepting the claim that the moral value of a given amount of welfare is time-insensitive saves us from two potential moral mistakes. The first potential mistake is producing prejudices on the

basis of *pure time preference*.<sup>305</sup> According to the *pure time preference*, present welfare matters more than near future welfare, and near future welfare matters more than far future welfare: welfare decreases in moral importance the further we move away from the present. If we give less weight to the welfare of someone living in the past or future because of pure time preference even if there are no morally relevant differences, then we favour or disfavour someone on an unreasonably arbitrary criterion. This can be linked to what Simon Caney calls "The moral equality argument". According to this argument, penalising someone merely because of their temporal location, or, more specifically, applying pure time discounting to future is wrong because it is inherently discriminative:

. . .someone's temporal location seems on a par with their racial identity or gender or ethnicity; and in the same way that it is wrong to penalize or discriminate against someone because of their race or gender so it is also wrong to discriminate against someone because of their date of birth.<sup>306</sup>

The second potential mistake is that pure time discounting could bring about a repugnant conclusion—for instance, Robert Wiblin states that "If applied consistently to the past, a modest rate of time preference of just 1% per annum would imply that Tutankhamen was more important than all 7 billion humans alive

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<sup>305</sup> Pure time preference is a preference which entails that something is preferred at some point in time only because it occurs at that time.

<sup>306</sup> Simon Caney, "Climate change, intergenerational equity and the social discount rate," *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 13, no. 4 (2014): 324.

today. This seems both immoral and absurd".<sup>307</sup> We could make the same mistake if we apply pure time discounting to future extremely poor—it would vastly undermine the moral value of welfare of a given amount of welfare *they* receive, even if the amount of welfare received by existing extremely poor and future extremely poor are the same. This seems absurd.

It is sometimes hard to empathise with future people. I believe that it would even be harder to empathise with the future extremely poor. But the future extremely poor are no different than the existing extremely poor with regards to their moral standing—whenever the moral value of a given amount of welfare is the same, we should not discount the benefits in the future on the basis of pure time preference. As stated, pure time discounting results in assuming that the moral value of a given amount of welfare differs over time, which produces prejudices and repugnant conclusions like Wiblin's example of Tutankhamun.

### 5.2.2 Rights continuing ad infinitum

Think of the deontological position that people have a right to adequate nutrition, safety, health and education, or in general, necessities. Such a right could in fact be recurring, or, in other words, be a *right continuing ad infinitum*. A right continuing ad infinitum means that it can be matched with any people including any future people. In that regard, if we think that existing people have a right to adequate nutrition, safety, health and education, or in general, necessities, then, all else being equal, that right should not

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<sup>307</sup> Robert Wiblin, "Was Tutankhamun A Billion Times More Important Than You?," Giving What We Can, April 4, 2013, <https://givingwhatwecan.org/post/2013/04/was-tutankhamun-a-billion-times-more-important-than-you/>.

cease to exist for the future extremely poor because temporal distance is not sufficient to condemn them to starvation, low education and health prospects, and miserable life. In assigning rights, the question should not be *when* people exist (or will exist) but *whether* they exist (or will exist). In other words, not-yet-existingness cannot be used to reject rights for any person who has moral standing.

If a right can continue ad infinitum, then the future extremely poor have rights just like the existing extremely poor have rights. Since the rights of any person have to be protected, the rights of the future extremely poor should also be protected. This is also valid for a specific subset of rights, namely, human rights. Following the lines of Beyleveld et al., "To deny that future humans have the same human rights as we do is to deny that there are human rights at all".<sup>308</sup> Put simply, if we argue that some members of humanity—such as the future extremely poor—do not have human rights, then "human rights" becomes a misnomer. It either applies to all people or not—if it applies to only the existing people, then it is not *human* rights: it is *existing humans'* rights. If we are accepting that there are existing humans' rights instead of human rights, then either future people including the future extremely poor have no human rights or have different human rights. It would mean that people (or some subset of people, such as the extremely poor) who will be living 100 hundred years from now have more human rights (or fewer human rights). Such an argument would mean that people living in the 2000s have more (or fewer) human rights than people living in the 1900s. But this is successfully refuted by Caney's rights-based

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<sup>308</sup> Deryck Beyleveld, Marcus Düwell and Andreas Spahn, "Why and How Should We Represent Future Generations in Policymaking?," *Jurisprudence* 6, no. 3 (2015): 550.

approach: Caney states that protection of rights requires a zero discount rate.<sup>309</sup> The dominant deontological position regarding human rights does not defend such a positive discount rate for future generations, and the moral irrelevance of temporal distance applies to human rights as well. In that case, the lives of the existing extremely poor and the lives of the future extremely poor should have equal moral value.

### 5.2.3 The importance of decision-making design for the future extremely poor

If the moral value of a given amount of welfare should be regarded as time-insensitive, and if rights protecting the interests of future people (including the future extremely poor) continue ad infinitum, then it is very important to adjust the political, economic and social decision-making processes accordingly so that the interests and the rights of future people can be taken into account. This may be done through in-government research institutions and the work of archivists, futures assemblies, posterity impact statements, and legislative houses for future generations.<sup>310</sup>

As the future extremely poor are unable to partake in the decision-making which will vastly affect them, they possess bad luck which makes them severely disadvantaged and vulnerable. This should be quite important for luck egalitarians, and they would tend to establish a decision-making mechanism which does not favour

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<sup>309</sup> Simon Caney, "Human rights, climate change, and discounting," *Environmental Politics* 17, no. 4 (2008): 540.

<sup>310</sup> Tyler M. John and William MacAskill, "Longtermist Institutional Reform," in *The Long View*, ed. Natalie Cargill (London, UK: FIRST), forthcoming.

the existing extremely poor. Such an idea is also compatible with care ethics. For instance, Thomas Randall states that "Given that future generations are in a perpetual condition of dependency on present-day people's actions, this is precisely the kind of relational structure that care theorists should be interested in morally evaluating".<sup>311</sup> The term *dependency* means that we are in a relationally favourable position than the future extremely poor as we are the ones who partially decide their destiny. Nevertheless, there is no reciprocity as we are not dependent on them. In that respect, what we consider bad luck could be identified as the undesirable result of dependency and be linked to a "power asymmetry" of which we should be cognisant in our decision-making.<sup>312</sup> Departing from similar concerns, Christopher Groves emphasises the importance of care in affecting the future:

Although [care] does not make the future any more predictable, it nevertheless provides us with opportunities for training ourselves to respond creatively, flexibly and (hopefully) consistently to its unpredictability, by recognising that we, no matter what we do, are inextricably linked to near and distant futures through the activities through which we realise our care and thereby *make* posterity.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Thomas Randall, "Care Ethics and Obligations to Future Generations," *Hypatia* 34, no. 3 (2019): 528.

<sup>312</sup> Karsten Klint Jensen, "Future Generations in Democracy: Representation or Consideration?," *Jurisprudence* 6, no. 3 (2015): 545.

<sup>313</sup> Christopher Groves, "Future ethics: risk, care and non-reciprocal responsibility," *Journal of Global Ethics* 5, no. 1 (2009): 27.

As we make posterity by some means or the other, taking care of the future is essential in compensating for the bad luck of the future extremely poor. Such a thought also requires us to establish an appropriate decision-making design.

To better understand the importance of decision-making design, suppose that we are living in one of the several independent communities dispersed among archipelagos. No community has ever communicated with the other community but we acknowledge the existence of each other. A volcano on our island has erupted. As a community, we immigrate to an astonishing and resource-rich island called Yonca in which no one has never ever lived. We anticipate that there will be a volcanic eruption in a neighbouring island named Erik in a very short time and the community living there will have to immigrate to other islands including ours. We implement a law which ensures a fair distribution of resources to *existing* residents. Out of our intentional ignorance, the law bars future newcomers from benefiting from Yonca's resources which would render them impoverished. It means that *because* we arrived Yonca earlier than any other community, we grant ourselves the right to withhold resources from future newcomers. If the volcano in Erik had erupted earlier than the volcano erupted in our previous island which forced us to immigrate, then the community in Erik would have arrived Yonca earlier than anyone else which would not leave them in a situation where they have to withstand impoverishment. They possess bad luck because the volcano in Erik did not erupt earlier, they have to encounter with our selfish community, and they do not have any authority over the decision-making regarding the distribution of resources.

As our community in Yonca usurps all of the resources, it is not fair that the future newcomers will not receive any of the resources that we have been endowed with. We know that there will be a volcanic eruption in Erik soon, there will be people in need, and we have no moral right to accumulate such resources, and use them however we wish. We have to share the resources which we had luckily found when we arrived in Yonca. Our good luck and the unfair usage of it translate into the bad luck of future newcomers.

The carelessness and even the evilnesses of our community could be identified as what Stephen M. Gardiner calls "the tyranny of the contemporary".<sup>314</sup> According to Gardiner, "The tyranny of the contemporary. . . [has] multiple roots. Perhaps the most obvious is ruthlessness: each generation, and especially the current generation in the more powerful countries, is committed to the single-minded pursuit of its own self-interest, understood in narrow, economic, and short-term ways".<sup>315</sup> While the term the tyranny of the contemporary reminds us the potential impact of existing people over future people, it also reveals that what I have called the bad luck is not merely an issue of accidentally finding oneself in an undesirable situation. Rather, someone's bad luck could be created by others where its compensation becomes an issue of justice. For instance, by accumulating resources and prohibiting others from receiving them, our community in Yonca wrongs and harms future newcomers. The future newcomers in Yonca will experience their bad luck as impoverishment. But the truth is that their bad luck owes its existence to our unjust enrichment of ourselves and not to

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<sup>314</sup> Stephen M. Gardiner, "A Call for a Global Constitutional Convention Focused on Future Generations," *Ethics & International Affairs* 28, no. 3 (2014): 300.

<sup>315</sup> Gardiner, 302.



randomness. As their bad luck has been deliberately brought about by us in the first place, the compensation for their bad luck becomes a demand of justice.

The archipelagos analogy represents the conflict between existing people and future people in the distribution of resources. In the real world, the future extremely poor possess bad luck as they are unable to partake in decision-making although their welfare may be negatively affected by our unwise choices. Their bad luck is aggravated if existing people disregard the interests of the future extremely poor. Existing people have the advantage of acting prior to the future extremely poor but that advantage is used unfairly if the resources are allocated on the basis of the self-interest of existing people. The responsibility to consider the interests of the future extremely poor falls on us.

One objection to the archipelagos analogy may be that it is not an analogy at all. After all, the people living in Erik who will be the future newcomers to Yonca already exist. Even though they are among the existing people, their existence means nothing to our community in Yonca *until* we know that they are going to come to Yonca. It is the same for the future extremely poor: they do not matter to us *until* we know that they will be born. If we know that they will be born, we have to be careful regarding how we distribute the resources since each unwisely used unit of resource drains their potential.

One may not object to considering the interests of future newcomers but instead claim that those who have come earlier to Yonca could plausibly give some additional weight to their own interests *just because* they have come earlier to Yonca. This violates the importance of the time-insensitivity of the moral value of a given

amount of welfare and the importance of rights continuing ad infinitum, and is implausible. Moreover, it may be said that the existing residents of Yonca are entitled to most of the resources while future newcomers are entitled to the remaining. Such a thought buttresses the implausible "finders keepers" system. Here, I follow the lines of Dan Dennis, where natural resources are distinguished from objects mixed with natural resources and labour: "In contrast [to the latter], natural resources would have existed had no persons existed. As a result of this, there are no grounds for giving one person a smaller share of natural resources than another".<sup>316</sup> Dennis refers to Ronald Dworkin's example of shipwrecked mariners where default position would be to share the resources equally if they do not have any morally relevant differences.<sup>317</sup> Dennis concludes that "The right-libertarian 'finders keepers' system of initial acquisition is largely arbitrary – leaving largely down to chance who gets the opportunity to claim resources. This is not just. In particular, it treats unfairly subsequent generations because they have no chance of making the initial acquisition".<sup>318</sup> Then, Dennis calls the existing generation to compensate for the loss of resources of future generations once there has been destruction and degradation.<sup>319</sup>

Worse still, defending the proposition that the existing residents are entitled most of the resources on the basis of finders

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<sup>316</sup> Dan Dennis, "Property Rights, Future Generations and the Destruction and Degradation of Natural Resources," *Moral and Political Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (2015): 111.

<sup>317</sup> Dennis, 111.

<sup>318</sup> Dennis, 112.

<sup>319</sup> Dennis, 117.

keepers system has the potential to legitimatise a real-world problem: long-term foreign debt. As demonstrated in the empirical research on extreme poverty, foreign debt is a crushing problem for the extremely poor where interest rates often make the accumulated foreign debt unrepayable. A country suffering from a long-term foreign debt becomes even more impoverished, and the living standards of the future extremely poor are compromised. If a well-planned foreign debt borrowing strategy is not implemented, and the rulers borrow money by giving weight to their own generations because of their greed, extravagancy or lack of rational understanding of the matter, then the future residents of that country including the future extremely poor will be adversely affected as they will be the ones who are actually repaying the foreign debt over the years. Even if the debt does not render the future residents impoverished, their welfare is stolen by the existing people just because they decide to give weight to their own. Such a fact evokes the importance of ensuring a well-planned foreign debt borrowing strategy where neither the rights nor the welfare of the future extremely poor is compromised. The case where our community in Yonca is asked to ensure a fair distribution of resources across existing residents and future newcomers is morally on a par with asking to implement a well-planned foreign debt borrowing strategy. In both cases, we have a responsibility towards future people who will be harmed if we wrong them with our decision. If we state that our community has no such a responsibility, then there is no reason why we should defend a sensible foreign debt borrowing strategy—we could just borrow money as much as we can with a very long repayment scheme while increasing the quality of the lives of existing people and letting future people including the future

extremely poor suffer from our improvident decision to save the day. Nevertheless, if we think that this is implausible, then it demonstrates that we owe them a well-thought-out decision to the best of our ability in allocating our resources.

Another objection may be that we do not know how the future extremely poor would have decided for themselves if they had been given a chance to shape the course of the world. We do not know how they would have intervened in the political decision-making process, we lack sufficient knowledge regarding how they would have adjusted the healthcare, and our predictions on how they would have reformed the economic structure may fail. Nonetheless, the ambiguity regarding how they would have acted for their future does not cancel out the necessity that we do have to do our best to offset their bad luck.

To make it plain, consider the following: we have two close relatives who have recently become coma patients after an accident. The doctor says that we have to choose one of the two drugs to recover from the coma: one paralyses a leg for two years, and the other paralyses an arm for two years. Since our relatives cannot decide for themselves, we have to make a decision. We try to remember their preferences and past experiences. We do not remember any instance where they said that legs could be preferred over arms, or vice versa. But we notice that our relatives have always liked long walks and it may be a tie-breaker. Upon thorough discussion and consensus among other relatives, we decide to instruct the injection of the drug which paralyses an arm for two years. When our relatives recover from the coma after the injection, one of them says that an arm paralysed is worse than a leg paralysed because it is harder to deal with everyday tasks. The other

relative disagrees, and expresses contentment due to the preserved ability to have long walks.

We could not know whether our relatives would disagree with us in the future and thus we could not take into account their future verdict. We could only take into account their *possible* future verdict. We behaved responsibly in the drug selection process by considering everything we possibly can, our intention was surely pure, and we chose the drug through rational decision-making. In that respect, we compensated for the bad luck of our relatives who at that time could not decide which drug was in their best interests. Here, the bad luck of our relatives was their inability to trigger a prudent decision-making process and their vulnerability in being subject to a careless decision-making process. Some may argue that if we had chosen the wrong drug we would not offset the bad luck of our relatives, but that was beyond our control because we were not omniscient. Likewise, the future extremely poor may disagree with the decisions that we make here and now regarding how to improve their lives. Provided that we consider every possible variable which may positively or negatively affect the lives of the future extremely poor via an evidence-backed methodology, we fulfil our responsibility to offset their bad luck, regardless of what they retrospectively think of our decisions.

#### 5.2.4 Where does effective altruism stand?

If effective altruism has serious arguments against considering the interests of the future extremely poor, then the systemic change objection could weaken. Once the systemic change objection weakens, individuals could be permitted to focus

on donating to effective charities for extreme poverty alleviation. In that respect, the position of effective altruism has to be made clear regarding considering the interests of the future extremely poor.

The commitments of effective altruism include cause impartiality and using evidence to do the most good. In that respect, assessing actions from "the point of view of the universe" is important for many leading effective altruists.<sup>320</sup> According to them, all else is being equal, a benefit or harm in Sierra Leone is morally equal to a benefit or harm in Liechtenstein. Again, according to them, all else being equal, a benefit or harm in antiquity is morally equal to a benefit or harm in a million years from now. Some effective altruists may disagree, but this is currently the position of the prominent figures in effective altruism.

Very much parallel to these considerations, an approach called the *longtermism paradigm* or in short, *longtermism*, has become popular in effective altruist circles.<sup>321</sup> In line with what the point of view of the universe requires, longtermism states that we have to consider all consequences of our actions equally no matter when or where they happen. Naturally, those consequences need not be immediate. In contrast, they could be affecting the far future. The upshot is that we must value all pleasure and pain equally across time. As the number of people who will be living in the future will greatly outnumber the people currently living, most of the value

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<sup>320</sup> Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Singer extensively discuss the moral importance of "the point of view of the universe" where they think that rational benevolence is based on it. Refer to Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics*, 134.

<sup>321</sup> A recent development is the foundation of The Global Priorities Institute at the University of Oxford where some philosophers of effective altruism do research on the longtermism paradigm and its implications.

lies at the future—hence, according to longtermism, the opportunities and challenges surrounding the future should be among our priorities.<sup>322</sup> Recently, effective altruism has recognised *the long-term future* as one of its cause areas and has even started to collect funds for it.<sup>323</sup>

Longtermism stresses mitigating existential risks, preventing the negative outcomes of artificial intelligence, increasing the safety of high-risk high-reward biotechnological research, boosting the capacity-building and coordination of global institutions, and improving the values of our civilisation. Basically, anything which has the potential to affect the future of our civilisation in a profound way could be in the scope of longtermism. Likewise, systemic change could be one of the research areas within longtermism as it promises to bring about a very high utility for the future, may it be near future or far future. Given the moral and political progress that the world witnessed over the past few centuries regarding justice and equality, systemic change has the potential to correct many of the problems for future people including the future extremely poor, such as cheap labour exploitation, foreign debt, military invasions and illicit financial flows. Reforming political institutions, proposing alternative economic systems, and increasing transparency and accountability are vastly important for the interests of the future extremely poor.

All in all, due to impartiality and attaching importance to the point of view of the universe, effective altruism is compatible with

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<sup>322</sup> The Global Priorities Institute, "A Research Agenda for The Global Priorities Institute," University of Oxford, February 2019, [globalprioritiesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/gpi-research-agenda.pdf](https://globalprioritiesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/gpi-research-agenda.pdf).

<sup>323</sup> "Long-Term Future Fund," The Centre for Effective Altruism, October 15, 2019, [app.effectivealtruism.org/funds/far-future](https://app.effectivealtruism.org/funds/far-future).

the idea that the future extremely poor matter as much as the existing extremely poor. In other words, effective altruism should have no problem in considering the interests of the future extremely poor. Moreover, effective altruism is theoretically open to regarding systemic change as a possible way to do the most good for the future extremely poor, and include it to its agenda within longtermism.

### 5.3 Charity or systemic change? The case of the future extremely poor

Up to now, I have made a case for considering the interests of the future extremely poor as much as the existing extremely poor, and showed that effective altruism has been keen on considering the interests of future people. However, how this can inform our discussion of Premise 4, the systemic change objection, and the comparison between charity and systemic change is another question. In the following, I evaluate several factors which contribute to our decision on how to allocate our spare resources, including numbers and fairness, and the distribution of utility. I defend the same position: that we should not allocate all of our spare resources to effective charities or to systemic change.

#### 5.3.1 Numbers and fairness

In Chapter 3, I argued that our decision regarding who to help should not only depend on the moral value of utility but also the moral value of fairness—and that there should be a negotiation



between saving the largest group and treating all parties (regardless of the size of the group they are in) fairly. Precisely because of this, I concluded that we should be responsive to group sizes: we should sometimes save the greatest number and sometimes act fairly, and there is no obligation for us to *always* save the greatest number or *always* act fairly. In Chapter 3, I assumed that we could either help one group or another. Although this is not the case here (because we can allocate our resources between the existing extremely poor and the future extremely poor however we like), understanding the level of unfairness is still important as we can include the badness of unfairness into our decision-making.

We can partly extend my train of thought in Chapter 3 to the discussion of systemic change. Recall the first proposition drawn from the systemic change objection: individuals should allocate *all* of their spare resources to systemic change. Think of a form of systemic change which never benefits the existing extremely poor but only the future extremely poor. Suppose that some proponents of systemic change have opened a bank account which saves money for the future extremely poor, and it will only be used for the future extremely poor. This means that there is an unfairness issue because this is done at the cost of the welfare of the existing extremely poor. The lives of the hundreds of millions of extremely poor are neglected. Related to that, Brian Berkey states that

[Proponents of systemic change] are instead advocating that we refrain from taking high probability steps to alleviate the suffering of today's global poor, in order to pursue low probability, potentially high reward efforts to improve global institutions, so that *different*

*people*, sometime in the future, are able to live under more just institutions than might otherwise exist. Whether or not we might be justified in prioritizing efforts to make global institutions more just for future people over improving welfare or quality of life for the current global poor, it seems clear that we cannot be required to do so as *a matter of respect for the current global poor*.<sup>324</sup>

We know some of the things we can do for the future extremely poor in the form of systemic change, such as a global reform of institutions, better accountability, preventing illicit financial flows, rethinking foreign debt, and combatting with the harsh after-effects of colonialism. But we are not sure *how many* future extremely poor we could affect by these. After some point in the future (say in 100 or 200 years), we cannot confidently and meaningfully predict how many future extremely poor there will be. If we had known, we could have compared their group size with the group size of the existing extremely poor and understand the level of unfairness done to each group once we have decided to save the greatest number. Here, we may apply some sort of uncertainty discounting (which should respect the time-insensitivity of the moral value of a given amount of welfare, as opposed to pure time preference discounting). Here, uncertainty discounting means that we should find a point in time after which we cannot confidently and meaningfully predict the number of the future extremely poor. For instance, we may see that we cannot confidently and meaningfully predict the number of the future extremely poor living after the year

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<sup>324</sup> Brian Berkey, "The Institutional Critique of Effective Altruism," 164.

4000 (if they ever live). Admittedly, this may mean that we cannot include the future extremely poor who *may be* affected by systemic change in the far future to those who we will help and allocate resources for. We do not even know whether they will exist (as extreme poverty may be eliminated by then).<sup>325</sup>

Hence, we can only compare the number of the existing extremely poor and the number of the future extremely poor (who will be living in the future, after applying the uncertainty discounting). There is no current projection regarding the number of the future extremely poor, which states that they will vastly outweigh the number of the existing extremely poor or be vastly outweighed by the number of the existing extremely poor in the predictable future. It can be assumed that the number of the existing extremely poor and the number of the future extremely poor will be relatively close in the predictable future. This brings about a direct objection to the first proposition of systemic change that we should allocate all of our spare resources to systemic change because it would be vastly unfair to the existing extremely poor. By the same token, we cannot be required to donate all of our spare resources to effective charities as a matter of respect for the future extremely poor. Donating all of our spare resources to effective charities unjustifiably neglects the interests of the future extremely poor who have the same interests as the existing extremely poor.

But there is a catch. There could be *overlapping positive effects* which affect both the existing extremely poor and the future

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<sup>325</sup> Note that uncertainty discounting is not the same with risk discounting. Risk refers to contexts where an outcome's probability can be calculated. Nonetheless, when there is uncertainty, we cannot calculate an outcome's probability because we cannot know whether it will occur. Refer to Simon Caney, "Climate Change and the Future: Discounting for Time, Wealth, and Risk," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 40, no. 2 (2009): 166.

extremely poor. Overlapping positive effects occur when a specific intervention originally designed for the existing extremely poor also affects the future extremely poor, and vice versa. For instance, donating all of our spare resources to effective charities could (1) prevent some future extremely poor from being born by decreasing the number of families living in extreme poverty, and (2) prevent some suffering of the future extremely poor by bringing about positive genetic differences, slightly increasing the quality of social conditions, and forcing some institutions to reform themselves. In that case, an intervention targeting the existing extremely poor could also benefit the future extremely poor. Likewise, although systemic change is mostly relevant to the future extremely poor who have not been born yet, some of its tiny early-stage effects could change the lives of the existing extremely poor. For instance, if a new global clean energy system which can fully mitigate the impacts of climate change across the world over a hundred years is being adopted, some of the existing extremely poor can also benefit from it throughout its implementation. Therefore, one may argue that accepting the first proposition and thus allocating all of the spare resources to systemic change does not necessarily disregard the interests of the existing extremely poor as it inevitably affects some of the existing extremely poor.

Although it is true that allocating all of the spare resources to systemic change can be made through the motivation of improving the lives of the existing extremely poor, achieving a fair distribution of utility through it would be a sheer coincidence. A fair distribution of utility demands careful adjustments of resources contingent on the ever-changing number of the existing extremely poor and the future extremely poor, comparison of social conditions and risks,

and feasibility. The possibility that allocating all of our spare resources to systemic change benefits not only the future extremely poor but also the existing extremely poor does not necessarily satisfy a fair distribution of utility—what it is at stake here is not to *whom* the first proposition benefits but to *whom* and *how much* it benefits. Insisting on implementing the first proposition is quite unlikely to ensure a fair distribution of utility because there is no flexibility in it. Unlike the first proposition, the second and third propositions grant us the flexibility of changing the amount of spare resources allocated to systemic change or effective charities so that they can be responsive to the changing conditions above mentioned.<sup>326</sup>

Overlapping positive effects could also be discussed in accordance with the idea that donating all of our spare resources to effective charities would guarantee the prevention of some of the future extremely poor from coming into existence and bring advantage to the other future extremely poor who will exist by increasing their opportunities. By preventing the future extremely poor who would have lives not worth living from existing, it saves them from their potential misery.<sup>327</sup> By increasing the opportunities of the other future extremely poor who will exist, they may be able to lift themselves out of extreme poverty a little bit easier than it would otherwise have been. In turn, some may claim that allocating all of our spare resources to effective charities may result in a fair

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<sup>326</sup> There can be an exceptional case where the first proposition ensures a fair distribution of utility: overlapping effects may grant an amount of utility to the existing extremely poor which can be morally equivalent to the amount of utility granted to the future extremely poor. If there is such a case, it would be a temporary instant. As the social conditions undergo a rapid change, we have to switch back either to the second or third proposition.

<sup>327</sup> I will tackle the non-identity problem in the next section because, presumably, there will be future extremely poor who will have lives *worth* living.

distribution of utility. However, this claim fails: even though donating all of the spare resources to effective charities may prevent some of the future extremely poor from coming into existence and benefit some of the future extremely poor, a fair distribution of utility is context-dependent and allocating all of our resources does not make us flexible in responding to the complex conditions. Again, if we notice that there will be many ambiguities regarding the calculation of the fair distribution of utility, then it should discourage us from embracing an "all-or-nothing" option. Apart from that, even in the very optimistic scenarios, the benefits that the future extremely poor receive from donating all of the spare resources to the most effective charities are very likely to be topped by the harms arising from it since it means that systemic change is neglected. Referring back to the empirical research done on extreme poverty, it should be fairly obvious that donating all of our spare resources to effective charities would be harmful to the future extremely poor as well as some of the existing extremely poor, let alone it achieving a fair distribution of utility.

### 5.3.2 The distribution of utility

Recall the risk, expected utility analysis and one's marginal impact through systemic change I discussed in §4.5. Suppose that they are all equal, but the *distribution* of utility is not.

What do I mean by the distribution of utility? Sometimes a given amount of distributed utility may not help a party to significantly improve their lives. For instance, donating spare resources to provide vitamin A tablets may significantly improve the lives of the existing extremely poor. Suppose that for each pound, X

amount of welfare improvement for each existing extremely poor is brought about through providing vitamin A tablets. X amount per capita is sufficient to significantly improve the lives of the existing extremely poor. Further suppose that allocating spare resources to a form of systemic change, such as preventing illicit financial flows, trivially improves the lives of the future extremely poor due to the vast number of the future extremely poor. May the amount of utility per capita be  $X-1000$ . This could especially be relevant for the future extremely poor living in the far future rather than the future extremely poor living in the near future. The benefits distributed among a very large population could bring about tiny utility per capita.

A different version may also be the case: this time, systemic change may bring about massive per capita improvements to the lives of the future extremely poor because of the long-lasting and accumulative benefits of a certain form of systemic change. Even if donating to effective charities could still significantly improve the lives of the existing extremely poor, the per capita benefits received by the future extremely poor far surpasses the per capita benefits received by the existing extremely poor.

These all depend on (1) the type and the strength of interventions of effective charities and the forms of systemic change, (2) the number of the existing extremely poor and the future extremely poor, (3) whether there is any distribution of utility bringing about trivial benefits per capita and/or significant benefits per capita, and (4) the difference between benefits of effective charities and systemic change per capita. Once there are changes in these, our decision regarding how much to allocate to whom is also apt to change. Again, this should make us wary about choosing to allocate all of our spare resources to systemic change or charities, because

all of these variables are likely to change rapidly and we should be flexible in our allocation.

### 5.3.3 The non-identity problem: a challenge to the systemic change objection?

So far, I have argued that we have to consider the moral value of a given amount of welfare of the existing extremely poor and the future extremely poor equally. I have also demonstrated that allocating our spare resources to both effective charities and systemic change is likely the best option as long as we keep track of the factors we weigh. Such a conclusion pushes us to accept either the second or the third proposition and urge effective altruism to seriously consider supporting systemic change.

But this conclusion is challenged by the non-identity problem. The non-identity problem was famously raised by Derek Parfit and has produced a vast literature since then. It states that if purportedly harmful actions bring about situations where people have lives worth living and where the alternative was never being born, then those purportedly harmful actions cannot have made the people affected worse off. Since they make nobody worse off, and so cannot have harmed them. If they *are* harmful, they are not harmful because they have made someone worse off. Derek Parfit's original example is *The 14-Year-Old Girl*.

*The 14-Year-Old Girl*. This girl chooses to have a child. Because she is so young, she gives her child a bad start in life. Though this will have bad effects throughout this child's life, his life will, predictably, be



worth living. If this girl had waited for several years, she would have had a different child, to whom she would have given a better start in life.<sup>328</sup>

Many would think that the girl's decision to give birth is harmful and that the decision has made the child worse off. Nonetheless, as Parfit puts it,

If she had waited, this particular child would never have existed. And, despite its bad start, his life is worth living. Suppose first that we do *not* believe that causing to exist can benefit. We should ask, 'If someone lives a life that is worth living, is this worse for this person than if he had never existed?' Our answer must be No. Suppose next that we believe that causing to exist *can* benefit. On this view, this girl's decision benefits her child.<sup>329</sup>

Here, a purportedly harmful act does not seem to be harmful. It is either permissible, or, if not, it is *not* impermissible on the grounds that it is bad *for* the child.

In our context, the non-identity problem arises in the case where not allocating spare resources to systemic change brings about future extremely poor whose lives are nevertheless worth living. But because of its adverse effects on welfare, rights and social inclusion, not allocating spare resources to systemic change appears to be very harmful and wrong. On the other hand, if we had

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<sup>328</sup> Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 358.

<sup>329</sup> Parfit, 359.

worked for, and achieved, systemic change, different people would have been born. Taken to its extreme, the non-identity problem may be claimed to subvert the systemic change objection at least in some of the cases where not allocating spare resources to systemic change bring about future extremely poor whose lives are nevertheless worth living where the alternative is never being born. It could also compel us to reject all of its propositions because we cannot make the future extremely poor worse off by not allocating spare resources to systemic change. Hence, the systemic change objection would become obsolete and effective altruism can justifiably ask individuals to donate all of their spare resources to effective charities.

Put simply, the non-identity problem is the inability of accepting the following at the same time (*NIPP* stands for the *Non-Identity Problem Premise*):

*NIPP* 1. An act is wrongful only if it is harmful to someone.

*NIPP* 2. Not allocating spare resources to systemic change cannot be harmful to the future extremely poor who have lives worth living and thus cannot make them worse off, because they otherwise would have not existed at all (in other words, they owe their existence to not allocating spare resources to systemic change).

*NIPP* 3. Not allocating spare resources to systemic change wrongs the future extremely poor (who have

lives worth living and owe their existence to not allocating spare resources to systemic change).

Imagine a dilemma where we will either donate to a charity or allocate our spare resources to systemic change.

The first option is that we donate to a charity to cure the life-threatening malnutrition of an existing 20-year-old extremely poor person. The life of the 20-year-old extremely poor person is extended to 50, preventing premature death. Our decision to donate to a charity triggers a causal chain where a future extremely poor is created who will live until the age of 20 and die by suffering from malnutrition, which is premature death. Both have lives worth living.

The second option is that we allocate our spare resources to systemic change. Because that we do not donate to a charity to extend the life of the 20-year-old extremely poor, that person dies at 20 by suffering from malnutrition, which results in premature death. But our decision to allocate our spare resources to systemic change triggers another causal chain different from the causal chain created in the first option, where a different future extremely poor is created who will live until 50. Both have lives worth living.

In the first option, we extend the life of someone by 30 years and create someone with a lifetime of 20 years (allowing premature death). In the second option, we do not extend the life of someone (enabling premature death) and create someone with a lifetime of 50 years.

According to NIPP 2, by not allocating our spare resources to systemic change, we cannot make the future extremely poor who will die at 20 worse off in the first option because that person otherwise would have not existed at all. In other words, we cannot

harm that person because the alternative of never being born is worse. Once we also accept NIPP 1, the person-affecting view, we cannot claim that not allocating spare resources to systemic change wrongs the future extremely poor who have lives worth living and who owe their existence to that act (NIPP 3). In contrast, by allocating our spare resources to systemic change in the second option, we harm someone because we let that already existing person die, which is supported by NIPP 1. This means that allocating spare resources to systemic change wrongs that existing extremely poor person who would otherwise have benefited from not allocating spare resources to systemic change—in contrast, if we had donated to charity, there would be no harm to anyone but only benefit. Some may claim that these all show that NIPP 3 is false—put simply, not allocating spare resources to systemic change does not wrong the future extremely poor. Such a conclusion can force us to move our spare resources that we are prepared to allocate for systemic change to charity.

We either have to concede that NIPP 3 is false or find another argument to address the non-identity problem. My argument will be based on challenging NIPP 2, by introducing *Punch* and *Amaya*.

Even if there could be some future extremely poor who have lives worth living and owe their existence to not allocating spare resources to systemic change, not allocating spare resources to systemic change could harm and wrong them. To understand this, we need to subscribe to a specific interpretation of harm. On this account of harm, harm does not need to make someone *overall* worse off than one could have otherwise been. It can, but it is not a necessary condition. The necessary condition is that harm makes

someone *at least locally* worse off than one could have otherwise been. Consider *Punch*.

*Punch*. Immediately after an argument, out of some weird feeling composed of grudge and enjoyment, I punch a friend of mine. My friend's teeth are broken and some of them are fractured. My friend feels severe pain and anxiety, and rushes to the dental hospital. Doctors soon discovered that my friend has been suffering from some asymptomatic oral disease for some time now. If I had not punched my friend, the diagnosis of my friend's oral disease would have been delayed, and it would have been at the advanced, dangerous stage—my friend would have been under tormenting pain for a significant amount of time and then would have died.

I certainly harmed my friend with my punch, breaking teeth and leave some of them fractured. But I also prevented massive harm by enabling the diagnosis of my friend's oral disease. In other words, via harming my friend with my punch, I significantly decreased the amount of overall harm that my friend would have otherwise been subject to if I had not punched my friend. My punch, albeit harm of its own, did not make my friend *overall* worse off. My friend would have been overall worse off if I had not punched them, because the overall harm would have been greater. But I harmed my friend by making my friend *locally* worse off, because I damaged my friend's teeth, which is local harm—I could have avoided punching my friend, but did not do so.

Some may argue that I did not harm my friend, because I decreased the amount of overall harm with my punch. I disagree. In that very moment that I punched my friend, there was harm to some degree, which is local harm. Whether or not I bring about lower overall harm at the end of the day does not change the fact that I brought about some harm in the beginning. Harm has been experienced, both physically and psychologically.

Local harms, and symmetrically, local benefits are components of one's welfare balance. Every existence-inducing action necessarily creates local harms and local benefits. When we add them up we understand whether that life is worth living. For instance, if local benefits outweigh local harms, then that person's welfare balance would be positive. In that case, that person would have a life worth living because that person has overall benefited from the life at stake. Likewise, if local harms outweigh local benefits, then that person's welfare balance would be negative. In that case, that person would not have a life worth living because that person has been overall harmed by the life at stake.

To understand how we could apply this sort of reasoning to the future extremely poor in the first and second options (charity versus systemic change), first consider a comparable example, failing to adequately tackle the residues of slavery. Let me introduce *Amaya*.

*Amaya*. Amaya's ancestors were enslaved for centuries until they gained their emancipation through an uprising. Amaya is a member of a post-slavery generation who enjoys legal equality with others and benefits from the political process which tries to

reverse the effects of slavery. However, even though they were able to do considerably more, previous post-slavery governments acted rather slowly to combat the residues of slavery, as they allocated a very tiny portion of their resources to wipe out the residues of slavery. These resources were not enough to adequately tackle the social and institutional residues of slavery, and to meaningfully increase the accessibility of Amaya's ancestors to healthcare, education, employment opportunities, and family planning. If previous post-slavery governments had allocated much more resources, Amaya would not have been born because Amaya's family would have acted differently in the light of family planning guidance they could have received. Therefore, Amaya's life is owed to the failure of post-slavery governments to allocate more resources to combat the residues of slavery.

Further suppose that Amaya has a life worth living as she enjoys free education and high-quality health services, an intimate family and a friend network, and has a passion for discovering the nature of the region she lives in. But because of the failure of the previous post-slavery governments, some people are still very hostile to those who come from minority backgrounds and aim to exclude them from the economic, social and political sphere. In fact, Amaya's job applications were many times rejected just because she is from a minority background where she had to accept a job with a lower salary and was forced to have lower welfare.

Amaya is not subject to overall harm but *is* subject to local harm. Despite the fact that Amaya has a life worth living and was born due the failure of the previous post-slavery governments, she is being locally harmed by that failure as well. The type of local harm that she is subject to is linked to "*identity-forming* group attachments" where individuals are harmed by virtue of their belongings to certain groups.<sup>330</sup> According to Ori J. Herstein,

. . . certain harms to groups, which originate in past wrongs, are currently wrongful because they harm currently living individuals through those individuals' identity-forming attachments to the harmed group. In such cases, the historic wrongs *continue* to harm the group, since the identity of the group is maintained throughout the generations. In turn, in each generation the group harm, originating in the historic wrongs, constitutively harms those formatively attached to the group (who are usually the members of the group). Thus, even though the historic wrong functions as a 'different-people act' in the case of the individual group members, the persisting harm to the group, grounded in the historic wrong, is ipso facto harmful to these individuals in a way that is immune to the non-identity argument.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Ori J. Herstein, "Historic Injustice, Group Membership and Harm to Individuals: Defending Claims for Historic Justice from the Non-Identity Problem," *Harvard Journal of Racial and Ethnic Justice* 25 (2009): 235.

<sup>331</sup> Herstein, 235.



Following Herstein's argument, we notice that the past wrongs originated from the failure of the previous post-slavery governments have resulted in continual harm to minorities. Even though Amaya has a life worth living, we cannot claim that the failure of the previous post-slavery governments did not locally harm Amaya. They indeed did by causing low welfare prospects, letting prejudices, and delaying the reforms needed. Even if they did not make Amaya overall worse off as the alternative of never having been born would be worse for Amaya, they nonetheless locally harmed Amaya. Just like I locally harmed my friend in *Punch*, Amaya is also locally harmed: not because Amaya is made overall worse off but because Amaya continually experiences different forms of local harms. NIPP 2 seems to be inadequate, because it neglects *local* harms and focuses exclusively on *overall* harms.

Now, recall the first and second options where we either allocate our spare resources to systemic change or donate to a charity. According to NIPP 2, by not allocating our spare resources to systemic change, we cannot be said to have harmed the future extremely poor in the first option who will live for 20 years because that future extremely poor has a life worth living and that future extremely poor owes their life to not allocating our spare resources to systemic change. But I disagree—we harm that person, not because we make that person overall worse off but because we make that person locally worse off. The local harm arises from causing premature death as a result of suffering from malnutrition, and we indeed triggered that local harm. We bring about a net benefit to that future extremely poor overall but we also harm that person locally because our action results in death by suffering from malnutrition. Hence, it seems that NIPP 2 is not as strong as it may

be thought at first glance because by not making any distinction between overall and local harms, it just assumes that we have to focus on overall harms—NIPP 2 misses the fact that there are local harms. When there are local harms, future people can be harmed locally, which challenges the non-identity problem in this example.

There may be a claim that the local harm that the future extremely poor (who have lives worth living) receive from not allocating spare resources to systemic change could be justified or pardoned because not allocating spare resources endows that person with a life worth living. Just because we do not harm them to the extent that we make their lives not worth living, we expect to be exempt from the moral blame that local harm assigns to the perpetrator. Although never having been born would be worse for the future extremely poor who will have lives worth living, it is not sufficient to justify or pardon the action of not allocating spare resources to systemic change *solely* on the basis that it has brought about lives worth living. It is not clear how it can be justified or pardoned or to what extent it can be justified or pardoned. For instance, suppose that, because of our action, we know that there will some future person who will have an extremely happy life for 40 years, and then that person will have to suffer 4 years of excruciating pain. We also know that without that action that person would otherwise have not existed. That person may still have a life worth living, provided that that person's happiness outweighs suffering. But it is unclear whether the existence-inducing action which leads to excruciating pain can be justified solely on the basis that we have brought about a life worth living. Existence-inducing actions can still be wrong either because of the *undesirable intensity* of a specific local harm or the *undesirable distribution* of local

harms, or both. For instance, in the recently mentioned example, the presence of excruciating pain may mean that the existence-inducing action wrongs the person who has a life worth living because the intensity of that local harm is extremely high. Parallely, we cannot straight away justify or pardon the decision of neglecting systemic change as it would continue to severely locally harm some of the future extremely poor even if they will have lives worth living. Presumably, many future extremely poor will suffer great local harms (even if they will have lives worth living) and the way that the local harms are distributed may be so undesirable that the mere fact that they will have lives worth living will not be sufficient to say that they are not wronged.<sup>332</sup>

What does this say about our decision between the first and the second option? Should we donate to charity or should we allocate our spare resources to systemic change? First, consider the table below for a summary.

	<i>20-Year-Old Existing Extremely Poor</i>	<i>Future Extremely Poor</i>
<i>First Option: Charity</i>	30 additional years	Giving 20 years by creating + local harm which leads to premature death
<i>Second Option: Systemic Change</i>	Local harm which leads to premature death	Giving 50 years by creating

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<sup>332</sup> There can be at least two readings of wronging here. The first is that since all existence-incuding acts bring about local harms, they all wrong the people they create (even if those people have lives worth living). The second is that existence-inducing acts which bring about local harms are wrong when those local harms brought about are undesirably intense and/or undesirably distributed. I focus on the latter.

As I have shown that not allocating our spare resources to systemic change can harm the future extremely poor (even if they have lives worth living) by making a distinction between local and overall harms, I think that choosing the first option and choosing the second option are morally on a par. In the first option, we do not let a 20-year-old extremely poor suffer from malnutrition (local harm) and die, and make that person live until the age of 50. But this act creates a future extremely poor who will live until the age of 20 and suffer from malnutrition (local harm), and die. Hence, we save someone from the local harm and let the other suffer from the same local harm. In the second option, it is the same: we let the 20-year-old extremely poor suffer from malnutrition (local harm) and die, while creating a future extremely poor person who will live until the age of 50. There is no difference in the amount of benefits and harms. We are morally permitted to choose either donating to charity or allocating our spare resources to systemic change. In this example, the non-identity problem cannot challenge the position that we should allocate our spare resources to systemic change.

One objection may be that while we benefit both the existing extremely poor and the future extremely poor by donating to a charity, we only benefit the future extremely poor by allocating our spare resources to systemic change. The objector might conclude that it is better to benefit two instead of one. Moreover, the objector might add that we both benefit and locally harm the future extremely poor when we donate, but only harm and do not benefit the existing extremely poor in any way when we allocate our spare resources to systemic change. The objector might conclude that it is better to both benefit and locally harm someone rather than only harm

another. I think we can reply to this by pointing out that we risk fetishising the number of people we benefit or harm. For instance, while it is true that we only harm and not in any way benefit the existing extremely poor when we allocate our resources to systemic change, we also benefit a future extremely poor by creating that person and giving a life of 50 years. Some might argue that rather than splitting the benefit of 50 years into two different benefits of 30 years and 20 years (the first option, when we donate to charity), creating someone and giving 50 years (the second option, when we allocate spare resources to systemic change) is preferable. While these issues are connected to the non-identity problem, they heavily depend on normative positions we take, and the non-identity problem alone does not have a sufficient force to address these issues in this example.

Note that all of the above examples are formulated on the assumption that not allocating spare resources to systemic change will create lives worth living. But it is unreasonable to believe that *all* of the future extremely poor will have lives worth starting. Most probably, the vast majority of the future extremely poor will have lives not worth starting due to the harsh conditions of malnutrition, diseases and oppression.<sup>333</sup> Amplified by neglecting systemic change, the systemic causes of extreme poverty will be even more pervasive: weaker rights protection, increased exploitation, relaxed legal standards, recurring long-term foreign debt, untreated corruption, etc. Not allocating spare resources to systemic change will wrong the future extremely poor because neglecting systemic change will create immense harms: current lack of attention to

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<sup>333</sup> There is a difference between lives worth starting and lives worth continuing. Refer to David Benatar, *Better Never To Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* (New York: Clarendon, 2006), 22.

systemic change will decrease the resources allocated to the future extremely poor. The alternative, never having been born, is better. Viewed in this way, not allocating spare resources to systemic change could be said to make some of the future extremely poor overall worse off than they would have otherwise been. As the non-identity problem is dependent on the existence of the lives worth living and the alternative being worse, it is not applicable for the future extremely poor who will have lives not worth starting. Avoiding bringing lives not worth starting into existence requires allocating spare resources to systemic change.

In summary, the distinction between overall and local harms (and thus, the distinction between making someone overall worse off and making someone locally worse off) explains why the non-identity problem does not subvert the need to allocate spare resources in the case where some future extremely poor will have lives worth living. Moreover, when we move our attention to the other case where there will many future extremely poor who will have lives not worth starting, the non-identity problem fades away. Rather than basing our decision to not allocate spare resources to systemic change on the non-identity problem, we can think about how we could further enhance our moral thinking and behaviour towards the future extremely poor. Referring to the non-identity problem, Makoff and Read note that "The central moral question becomes, . . . 'what kinds of future lives and circumstances should we facilitate in coming to be?'. Or, again: 'what kinds of future are we leaving to the beings, whoever precisely they will turn out to be, who will constitute our posterity?'"<sup>334</sup> These questions point us the

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<sup>334</sup> Ruth Makoff and Rupert Read, "Beyond Just Justice – Creating Space for a Future-Care Ethic," *Philosophical Investigations* 40, no. 3 (2017): 234.

right direction in considering the interests of the future extremely poor. Apart from other reasons, neglecting systemic change would be wrong because we would fail to comply with a motivation which is oriented towards creating ideal circumstances for the future extremely poor. Self-inquiry on our moral progress could prevent us from committing wrongs such as carelessness, imprudence and obliviousness for the future extremely poor.

## 5.4 Conclusion

Firstly, there are reasons to consider the interests the future extremely poor as much as the existing extremely poor. In my evaluation, I have drawn attention to the time-insensitivity of the moral value of a given amount of welfare, and the rights continuing ad infinitum. I have also described the importance of decision-making design for the future extremely poor via analysing their bad luck. These reasons can be attractive both for consequentialists and deontologists. Given that there are reasons to consider the interests of the future extremely poor as much as the existing extremely poor, the systemic change objection becomes even more irresistible: the need for systemic change is a need for alleviating extreme poverty and at the same time not creating some of the future extremely poor, or paving the way for lifting out of extreme poverty with less effort if the future extremely poor ever exist.

Secondly, it is very hard to decide how to divide our spare resources between effective charities and systemic change. However, by appealing to numbers and fairness, and the distribution of utility, we notice that allocating all of our spare resources either to effective charities or systemic change would be misleading due to

the complex features of decision-making. Moreover, the decision how much to distribute to effective charities and systemic change is essentially an ever-evolving process, where we have to avoid universally sticking to one option. Alongside the above factors, I have already considered risk and expected utility in Chapter 4, and they all apply to the future extremely poor. The probability of success chance of systemic change affecting the future extremely poor, its respective expected utility and one's marginal impact in affecting the lives of the future extremely poor all contribute to one's review of these factors. All of these factors present us a combined tool of decision-making. We cannot categorically state that the second proposition is superior to the third proposition, or vice versa because we do not know how these factors would work out in specific contexts. But what is more plausible is that donating all of our resources to effective charities or allocating all of our resources to systemic change is very much likely to miss the importance of at least some of the factors. The conclusion is that although we should treat the existing extremely poor and the future extremely poor as equally deserving where no one should be given more weight, we could justifiably allocate more spare resources either to effective charities or systemic change after reviewing the factors discussed. These factors do not result in discounting the moral value of a given amount of welfare. But these factors could result in allocating an unequal amount of resources because of the relative importance of factors discussed. Given the complex nature of the impact brought about by effective charities and systemic change on the lives, and the plurality of factors that we should consider, it is unlikely that we end up with either donating all of our spare resources to effective charities or allocating all of our spare resources to systemic change.



It is very likely that we will find ourselves witnessing a negotiation between the second and the third proposition.

Thirdly, the non-identity problem is not a threat to the systemic change objection. Nor it is a threat to effective altruism supporting systemic change. The non-identity problem only focuses on overall harms and misses to recognise local harms—the presence of local harms, especially in the case of extreme poverty, challenges the non-identity problem. In the case of extreme poverty, local harms may be immense (although still not enough to render the lives of the future extremely poor not worth living) and it is not always clear that we should justify or pardon local harms *just because* they do not render the lives of the future extremely poor not worth living. In that case, the non-identity problem loses its strength. Moreover, some of the future extremely poor who will have been born as a result of not allocating spare resources to systemic change will have lives not worth starting, and they will be immune to the non-identity problem.

Lastly, effective altruism is compatible with considering the interests of the future extremely poor: after all, effective altruism is cause-impartial. Moreover, given the increasing popularity of the longtermism among the philosophers of effective altruism, the issues surrounding the future will become more and more attractive and causes related to systemic change are likely to gain prominence. Therefore, effective altruism is also compatible with asking individuals to allocate most or some of their spare resources to systemic change if the proposed form of systemic change is found to be feasible.

# Conclusion

In the thesis, I have assessed this argument for effective altruism, which is broadly indicative of popular arguments for the obligation to donate to charities which alleviate extreme poverty:

*Premise 1.* Extreme poverty is very bad.

*Premise 2.* If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it.

*Premise 3.* Individuals ought to choose the effective option in preventing very bad things.

*Premise 4.* Donating to effective charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty.

*Conclusion.* Individuals ought to donate to effective charities working towards extreme poverty alleviation where doing so does not require them to give up anything of moral significance.

I have analysed the four premises of effective altruism, the first three of which constituted a chapter each, and the last premise constituted two chapters.

In Chapter 1, which analyses the premise "Extreme poverty is very bad", I claim that while the premise is uncontroversial, effective altruists should not approach extreme poverty through the lens of hedonistic utilitarianism because it is far too limited and brings about two repugnant conclusions. Since hedonistic utilitarianism only focuses on suffering in explaining the badness of things

including extreme poverty, it would not find extreme poverty as very bad if one day extreme poverty no longer produces suffering. Moreover, it would justify the secret killing of those who perpetually suffer under extreme poverty. That is why effective altruists should not solely use the concept of suffering in explaining the badness of extreme poverty. Likewise, effective altruism as a movement should be cautious about using the discourse of hedonistic utilitarianism.

Chapter 2 explored the premise "If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it". This is Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice. First, I delineated several different variants of the principle, based on different understandings of "moral significance". I then focused on a particular interpretation of moral significance. I argued that while this principle could be a commonly accepted principle which assigns a moral obligation to alleviate extreme poverty, it has several problems. One problem is that it is overpermissive, it may ask too little from certain individuals. Another problem is that it is negligent about several sources of responsibility and only appeals to mere ability as a source of responsibility. An additional problem is that it does not mention the moral rights of the extremely poor, although it is centred around the moral obligation of individuals. I argued that by supporting Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice through additional principles, we could make it a plausible one.

In Chapter 3, I scrutinised the premise "Individuals ought to choose the effective option in preventing very bad things". I first showed that Singer's argument, first presented in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", required an additional principle, which is commonly taken to be the inspiration for effective altruism, does not

lead us to *effective* altruism. Singer's Weaker Principle of Sacrifice only requires us to prevent very bad things from happening. When there is more than one very bad thing that can be prevented, it does not direct us on which to prevent. Therefore, I showed, the Weaker Principle of Sacrifice must be accompanied by an effectiveness principle.

I argued that effectiveness, for the most part, is acceptable. I show that we could justify effectiveness through both an outcome-based principle and an obligation-based principle. However, it has its limits. Always endorsing effectiveness could severely violate fairness, which may result in unjustly favouring the well-off, preferring tiny improvements in the lives of a large number of well-off as opposed to massive improvements in the small number of worst-off, and perpetuating the unequal luck distribution across the worst-off (especially in the case of donating). Since effectiveness is at the core of effective altruism, effective altruists should be wary of the limits of effectiveness, and should pay attention to the moral value of fairness as well.

In Chapter 4, which focused on the premise "Donating to effective charities is one of the best ways to alleviate extreme poverty", I claimed that the premise is indeed true. Effective charities do impressive work and they improve the lives of the extremely poor much more than other charities. However, the premise has to be defended against the systemic change objection. The systemic change objection states that effective altruism unjustifiably distracts individuals from allocating their spare resources to systemic change. After looking at empirical research on extreme poverty, I observed that addressing extreme poverty certainly needs systemic, institutional and large-scale reforms. But it is a high-risk action, and

some effective altruists may plausibly not want to allocate all of our spare resources to systemic change. However, they should also not allocate all of their spare resources to effective charities because of the potential of systemic change.

In Chapter 5, which continued to focus on Premise 4, I stated that there are reasons for thinking that the interests of the extremely poor are morally equivalent to the interests of the future extremely poor. I also stated that primary beneficiaries of donating are the existing extremely poor, and the primary beneficiaries of allocating spare resources to systemic change are the future extremely poor. These are other reasons to divide spare resources between effective charities and systemic change, because allocating all of the spare resources to either effective charities or systemic change neglect either the existing extremely poor or the future extremely poor, although they should be treated as morally equal. But this reasoning is challenged by the non-identity problem, which implies that there might be no reason to allocate spare resources to systemic change. I demonstrate that the non-identity problem is not a problem for one's decision to allocate one's spare resources to systemic change. I conclude that we should neither allocate all of our spare resources to systemic change nor to effective charities, and this conclusion implies that, alongside systemic change, donating to effective charities is one of the best ways to improve the lives of the extremely poor.

Effective altruism is an ever-evolving philosophical approach and social movement. This movement has the potential to live on through the upcoming decades, perhaps centuries. Since it is a very young movement, it has to be very careful in determining, evaluating and choosing its principles. Even for the seemingly obvious

premises, there have been objections to which effective altruism has owed responses. Through facing those objections and giving responses, I hope to have contributed to strengthening the underlying moral commitments of effective altruism.

Albeit their limitations, all of the premises of effective altruism are true. This brings us to the conclusion that individuals ought to donate to effective charities working towards extreme poverty alleviation where doing so does not require them to give up anything of moral significance. For many reasons scrutinised in this thesis, individuals are morally linked to the extremely poor and they owe some portion of their wealth to the extremely poor. In an increasingly globalised world, moral relations between parties are more and more emphasised. It is very important to be cognisant of these moral relations so that individuals would not forget their relatively privileged position in the world and benefit the worst-off as much as they can.

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